

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE JOINTLY WITH
THE COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL
INTERGROUP RELATIONS AND COMMITTEE
ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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May 13, 2022
Start: 10:02 a.m.
Recess: 4:43 p.m.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING (VIRTUAL ROOM 1)

B E F O R E: Justin Brannan,
Chairperson for the Committee on
Finance

Chi A. Ossé,
Chairperson for the Committee on
Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
International Intergroup Relations

Shekar Krishnan,
Chairperson for the Committee on
Parks and Recreation

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Eric Dinowitz
Amanda Farias
Shahana K. Hanif
Crystal Hudson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: (CONT.)

Rita C. Joseph
Farah N. Louis
Francisco P. Moya
Sandra Ung
Justin Brannan
Ari Kagan
Marjorie Velázquez
Kristin Richardson Jordan
Pierina Ana Sanchez
Gale A. Brewer
Charles Barron
David M Carr
Diana Ayala
Keith Powers
Rafael Salamanca Jr.
Mercedes Narcisse
Kalman Yeger

A P P E A R A N C E S

Linda E. Johnson
President and CEO Brooklyn Public Library

Karen Sheehan
Executive Vice President Finance and
Administration of the Brooklyn Public Library

Nick Buron
Senior Vice President Queens Public Library

Tony Marx
President New York Public Library

Iris Weinshall
Chief Operating Officer at New York Public
Library

Laurie Cumbo
Commissioner of the New York City Department of
Cultural Affairs

Sheelah Feinberg
Deputy Commissioner of the New York City
Department of Cultural Affairs

Shirley Levy
Chief of Staff of the New York City Department of
Cultural Affairs

Phillippa Shao
DCLA Director of Finance

Susan Donoghue
New York City Parks Commissioner

Iris Rodriguez-Rosa
First Deputy Commissioner

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Vincent Cirrito
Assistant Commissioner

Mark Focht
Deputy Commissioner

Margaret Nelson
Deputy Commissioner

Joy Wang
Deputy Commissioner

Jennifer Greenfeld
Acting Deputy Commissioner

David Stark
Executive Financial Officer

David Cerron
Assistant Commissioner

Matt Drury
Director of Government Relations

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1
2 SERGEANT BRADLEY: PC recording is up.

3 SERGEANT BIONDO: Cloud underway.

4 SERGEANT BRADLEY: Okay, Sergeant Biondo, you may
5 begin the opening.

6 SERGEANT BIONDO: Good morning and welcome to
7 today's Remote New York City Council Executive Budget
8 Hearing for the Fiscal Year 2023 on the Committee on
9 Finance jointly with the Committee on Cultural
10 Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup
11 Relations and to be later followed by the Committee
12 on Parks and Recreation.

13 At this time, would all panelists please turn on
14 their videos for verification purposes. To minimize
15 disruptions, please place all electronic devices to
16 vibrate or silent mode. Public testimony will be
17 heard on Thursday, May 25th beginning at 10:00 a.m.
18 Again, that is Thursday, May 25th at 10:00 a.m.

19 If you would like to submit testimony please send
20 via email to testimony@council.nyc.gov. That is
21 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your
22 cooperation. Chairs, we are ready to begin.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you Sergeant.

24 [GAVEL] Good morning everyone. Good morning to
25 everyone assembled today on this Zoom. Today is

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2 Friday, May 13th and we're about to begin the first
3 portion of our sixth day of Executive Budget
4 hearings. Today, I'm joined by Council Member Chi
5 Ossé, Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
6 Libraries and International Intergroup Relations.

7 First on the agenda, we have our New York's
8 library systems. I want to extend a warm welcome to
9 the Brooklyn Public Library, the New York Public
10 Library and the Queens Public Library. The library
11 systems projected Fiscal '23 Budget of \$419.1 million
12 represents less than one percent of the city's
13 proposed FY23 budget in the Executive Plan. The
14 library systems Fiscal '23 budget increased by less
15 than one percent, \$946,000 from the Preliminary Plan
16 of \$418 million.

17 The increase is the result of a heat, light and
18 power subsidy adjustment for the systems. Libraries
19 are the cornerstone of every single community in this
20 great city in many underserved areas, libraries can
21 mean the difference, the direction of a young persons
22 life takes. It can mean learning to speak English
23 for new immigrants to our city, to where people young
24 and old learn to read and foster their thirst for
25 knowledge.

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2 No matter where technology takes us, libraries
3 are still standing and have adapted to these modern
4 times. Books side by side with tablets, one can
5 never overstate the outsized positive impact that
6 these tabernacles of freedom have on the city and its
7 residents.

8 My questions will be focused on the budget
9 response to the Council's priorities and the Expense
10 Budget, Council initiatives and headcount. I look
11 forward to hearing from the assembled panelists
12 today. I want to give a special thanks before we
13 start to Aliya Ali for her hard work in preparation
14 for today's hearing and of course to John Yedin and
15 Counsel Central Staff and the Finance team for all
16 the work they put into these remote hearings. This
17 was a very full week of hearings. We have another
18 full hearing today and I appreciate everyone who
19 works hard behind the scenes to make this possible.

20 I'll now turn it to my Co-Chair for today,
21 Council Member Ossé.

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much Chair
23 Brannan and good morning and welcome to the hearing
24 for the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
25

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2 International Intergroup Relations. Council Member
3 Chi Ossé, Chair of this Committee.

4 Today, we will begin with a hearing on the city's
5 three library systems followed by a hearing on
6 cultural affairs. This morning, we will be
7 discussing the Fiscal 2023 Executive Expense and
8 Capital Budget for the systems. In the Fiscal 2023
9 Preliminary Budget, the Administration proposed a
10 \$418.1 million subsidy for our libraries.

11 At our last budget hearing, our library systems
12 testified that there needed to be more investments to
13 the libraries budget, especially as our city
14 navigates through the pandemic. Our libraries are
15 beacons in our communities, lending free books,
16 providing civics materials on voting, immigration
17 exam prep and driving test manuals, serving as
18 community spaces for our youth and families and so
19 much more.

20 During COVID-19 our libraries were faced with a
21 crisis and took it on to ensure that our communities
22 were kept afloat during a time of uncertainty.

23 During the height of the pandemic, our libraries
24 distributed PPE and COVID tests, provided mobile
25 hotspots and Wi-Fi and shifted all programming to a

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2 virtual format. All of this was done successfully by
3 our libraries despite a global pandemic and a staff
4 shortage due to retirements seen in the systems.

5 As the city shifts toward COVID recovery, our
6 libraries need our support and the administrations
7 support more than ever and the budget outlined in the
8 Preliminary Budget was not sufficient to meet the
9 libraries needs.

10 For Fiscal 2023, the Administration is proposing
11 a \$419.1 million subsidy for the systems, which is
12 only a \$946,000 increase to the preliminary budget
13 allocation. This increase was only due to a heat,
14 light and power subsidy adjustment and funding for
15 the Action NYC program. Furthermore, the Fiscal Year
16 2023 Preliminary Capital Commitment Plan, which
17 covers Fiscal 2022-2026 includes \$764.3 million for
18 the library systems. Which is only less than one
19 percent of the city's total \$94.9 billion capital
20 commitment plan for Fiscal 2022-2026.

21 This is not enough to sustain our libraries,
22 especially as operations are doubled due to the
23 pandemic and I'm disappointed and upset that the
24 Administrations Executive Budget does not reflect
25 these needs. We need to ensure that our libraries

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2 have enough expense funding to keep up with our COVID
3 recovery work. Additional funds are needed to
4 support the library so that they can manage the year
5 over year increase in programming and circulation
6 expenses. And cover the rise in cost of materials,
7 staff and operating expenses. Our libraries also
8 need sufficient capital funding to maintain their
9 physical infrastructure and to make repairs without
10 having to use other sources of funds critical to
11 their work.

12 I want to ensure that the Fiscal 2023 Budget
13 adequately funds the city's library systems as they
14 recover from the economic impacts of the COVID-19
15 pandemic. To ensure that the city is well-equipped
16 to manage the recovery from this pandemic, the
17 Council calls on the Administration to support the
18 library systems by increasing their expense and
19 capital budgets to meet all shortfalls the systems
20 have. Especially as our systems predominantly rely
21 on city funding for their operations. It is
22 essential that the budget that we adopt this year is
23 transparent, accountable, and reflective of the
24 priorities and interests of the Council and the
25 people we represent.

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2 I look forward to active engagement with the
3 Administration over the next few months to ensure the
4 Fiscal 2023 Adopted Budget meets the goals the
5 Council has set up. I would like to recognize the
6 members of the Committee who are present. Council
7 Member Farias, Council Member Dinowitz, Council
8 Member Louis, Council Member Ung, uh, and that is
9 all.

10 I would also like to thank my staff for
11 organizing today's hearing including my Chief of
12 Staff Naomi Hopkins and my Policy and Budget Director
13 Maybutrabon Battana(SP?) and from central staff
14 Committee's Counsel amazing Brenda McKinney,
15 Legislative Policy Analyst Cristy Dwyer and Unit Head
16 Aliya Ali. Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chairs. Good
18 morning and welcome and to the first portion of the
19 Executive Budget hearing for May 13th, the Library
20 collection. My name is Malcom Butehorn and I am
21 Counsel to the Finance Committee.

22 I would first like to acknowledge Council Members
23 present for the record. We are joined today by
24 Council Members Brannan, Ossé, Louis, Ung, Kagan,
25 Farias, Velázquez and Dinowitz. Unlike in past,

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2 Council Members and members of the mayoral
3 administration will have the ability to mute and
4 unmute themselves. When not speaking, we ask that
5 you please remember to mute yourself and if you
6 forget to do so and we hear background noise we will
7 go ahead and mute you.

8 Council Members who have questions should use the
9 raise hand function in Zoom. We have a tight
10 schedule today, so we ask that Council Members please
11 stick to the five minutes and listen for the
12 Sergeants queue. The following members of the
13 Administration will testify and/or answer questions
14 today Linda E. Johnson, President and CEO Brooklyn
15 Public Library, Karen Sheehan Executive Vice
16 President Finance and Administration of the Brooklyn
17 Public Library, Nick Buron Senior Vice President
18 Queens Public Library, Tony Marx President New York
19 Public Library and Iris Weinshall Chief Operating
20 Officer at New York Public Library.

21 I will first read the oath and after, I will call
22 on each of you individually to respond. Do you
23 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing
24 but the truth before these committees and to respond

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2 honestly to Council Member questions? President

3 Johnson?

4 LINDA JOHNSON: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: EVP Sheehan?

6 KAREN SHEEHAN: I do.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: SVP Buron?

8 NICK BURON: I do.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: President Marx?

10 TONY MARX: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: COO Weinshall?

12 IRIS WEINSHALL: I do.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you and the speaking
14 order will be President Johnson, President Marx
15 followed by Senior Vice President Buron. President
16 Johnson, you may begin when ready.

17 LINDA JOHNSON: Thank you so much. Good morning
18 everyone. I am Linda Johnson, I'm President & CEO of
19 Brooklyn Public Library. Thank you, Speaker Adams,
20 Chairs Brannan and Ossé, and committee members for
21 the opportunity to testify on the executive budget,
22 and to our Brooklyn delegation and the entire City
23 Council for your efforts to ensure our branches
24 remain safe, welcoming, inspiring spaces for all.

25

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2 Today, I ask that you continue your longstanding
3 investment in New York City's Public Libraries,
4 first, by restoring the Council's \$14 million dollar
5 Libraries Initiative. This is a top priority, as
6 this crucial funding was not carried forward in the
7 Fiscal 2023 Executive Budget proposal and without
8 this funding, we will be forced to rollback service.

9 Additionally, we need the Council's support for
10 our collective request to the administration for
11 \$15.7 million in new expense funds. Likewise, our
12 three systems' capital needs are extensive. Together
13 we submitted capital budget requests to the
14 administration totaling \$163 million for fiscal year
15 2023. While we were heartened to receive new capital
16 funding in the Executive Budget, we have outstanding
17 needs that the Council can be helpful in addressing.

18 We appreciate the Speaker, Finance Committee and
19 entire Council for backing increased funding for
20 libraries in your preliminary budget response, and we
21 urge the city's continued support, so we can serve
22 the public at the level they have come to expect and
23 deserve. Prior to the pandemic, Brooklyn Public
24 Library welcomed over nine million visits in a single
25 year, with more than 15 million books circulated and

2 over 1 million program attendees. Though the
3 pandemic forced us to shut our doors for the first
4 time in our 125-year history, we adapted our programs
5 to digital platforms with tremendous success. From
6 Storytimes in over one dozen languages to live
7 personalized homework help, teen internships, adult
8 learning classes and career coaching, patrons of all
9 ages relied on us in multiple ways.

10 And as for the staggering 30 percent of
11 Brooklynites who lack digital access, we helped
12 bridge the divide. Brooklyn Public Library boosted
13 our free Wi-Fi signal 300 feet in every direction
14 beyond our branch walls and helped patrons in
15 neighborhoods with the lowest rates of broadband
16 access to sign up for the federal Affordable
17 Connectivity Program. We also loaned hotspots to
18 Adult Learning students, offered bedtime stories by
19 phone, hosted Learning Labs in six branches for
20 children to school remotely and regularly called to
21 check in on dozens of homebound patrons. Our
22 librarians performed incredible work despite the
23 obstacles.

24 Just last week, Nicole Bryan, manager of Macon
25 Library in Bedford-Stuyvesant, in Chairman Ossé's

2 district, was honored with a national "Mover and
3 Shaker" award from Library Journal. Nicole started
4 her position at the branch just two months before the
5 pandemic hit and was among the first to experiment
6 with outdoor library service. In the summer of 2020,
7 she arranged to close off the street in front of her
8 branch setting up book carts, community events and
9 lively outdoor programming. Nicole has recently been
10 honored as a local health hero, as well, recognizing
11 her leadership in helping the city reopen during the
12 pandemic. We have always been strong partners for
13 the city, serving as polling places and cooling
14 centers, establishing IDNYC registration centers and
15 welcoming new Americans. Libraries stepped up again
16 as COVID hit, hosting information and mask
17 distribution, testing, and vaccination sites for
18 children.

19 As our city struggles through new COVID variants
20 we continue to partner with the Test and Trace Corps.
21 Right now, anyone can pick up a free at-home COVID
22 test at any of our branches, Brooklyn Public Library
23 has already distributed more than 56,000 kits
24 throughout the borough. We are more than two years
25 into this pandemic, and our dedicated staff is

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2 working to meet the demand for increased library
3 service. While we have not yet returned to pre-
4 pandemic levels across the board, data trends show
5 that we are well on our way. Books, of course, are
6 still a top request, with more than 825,000 items
7 circulated throughout our system in March alone, the
8 highest monthly circulation we have had since
9 February 2020.

10 Of course, there is more to meeting increased
11 demand than simply enhancing our physical and digital
12 collections. We face a particular challenge now,
13 balancing services both in-person and virtually,
14 which further strains our resources. Brooklyn Public
15 Library strives to offer the innovative and cutting-
16 edge programming that we are known for, and now we
17 must provide in all the ways that the public has come
18 to expect. I described this challenge at the
19 Council's recent hearing on BIPOC youth learning
20 loss. About 90,000 teen patrons attended our virtual
21 programs during the pandemic, and while the number of
22 those coming back to the library in person has
23 increased significantly, many are continuing to
24 participate online.

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2 Expanding hybrid teen programming, enhancing our
3 physical spaces and increasing teen centers in our
4 branches are top priorities, but it requires
5 increased funding to maintain the digital progress
6 that we made incented by the pandemic and to continue
7 to build on the bricks and mortar and community
8 service functions that our branches provide. Like
9 other agencies, Brooklyn Public Library was asked to
10 absorb a PEG in the current fiscal year. We have
11 been able to endure the cut by maintaining existing
12 vacancies. However, running a system without full
13 staffing is pushing us to the limit of our capacity
14 to operate and this is why restoration of the
15 Council's Libraries Initiative is so important.

16 The allocation of \$14 million across the three
17 systems, \$3.9 million of which is for Brooklyn Public
18 Library, allows us to continue providing services.
19 Without it, we risk having to cut our already
20 insufficient branch repair budget, cut our
21 collections budget, and eliminate positions. But
22 restoring \$14 million dollars alone will not solve
23 the problem. As the city continues to emerge from
24 the pandemic, our libraries must be functionally
25 capable of providing robust service.

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2 Earlier this year the three library systems
3 outlined our new needs for the Administration,
4 requesting \$15.7 million dollars in new expense
5 funding for Fiscal Year 2023. This includes \$5
6 million dollars for Brooklyn Public Library to
7 enhance our physical and digital collections to meet
8 growing demand; to allow us to perform building
9 repairs that are either emergencies or not capitally
10 eligible; and to replace our antiquated Information
11 Technology systems that are almost 30 years old.
12 These are not luxuries; your support for this request
13 is necessary for us to continue to serve all New
14 Yorkers.

15 Beyond staffing, collections and programs,
16 libraries must be safe and inspiring spaces for
17 everyone who comes through our doors. Brooklyn Public
18 Library is the steward of 62 locations; more than one
19 million square feet of city-owned buildings plagued
20 by failing HVAC systems, leaking roofs and broken
21 boilers. Last fiscal year, we lost an astonishing
22 twelve hundred hours of public service due to
23 unplanned closures throughout the system, with
24 disruptions at 51 of our branches. With \$250 million
25 in deferred maintenance and no recurring unallocated

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2 capital funds to depend on, we must prioritize
3 emergencies instead of focusing on preventative
4 maintenance, and choose which projects make limited
5 progress while others stall until the next budget
6 cycle.

7 To address emergency repairs that simply cannot
8 wait for the initiation of a new capital project, the
9 library is forced to dip into our precious operating
10 funds. Approaching our infrastructure needs
11 responsibly in our submission to the Administration,
12 Brooklyn Public Library detailed \$130.1 million
13 dollars' worth of capital needs over the next four
14 years. We were pleased that \$20 million was
15 allocated for Brooklyn Public Library in the four
16 year capital plan. While this welcome allocation
17 shows an understanding of our serious infrastructure
18 challenges, it unfortunately leaves us with \$110
19 million in unfunded needs.

20 City Council capital funding has kept our library
21 upgrades and renovation projects alive and moving
22 forward. Ranging from \$5 to \$10 million a year over
23 the last decade coupled with individual member
24 allocations, council capital funding has been a
25

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2 lifeline, allowing us to repair and renovate branches
3 that otherwise might have continued to deteriorate.

4 For fiscal year 2023, we are requesting \$10
5 million in systemwide capital funding from the
6 Council to help us meet our unmet project needs
7 throughout the borough. We have shown that with
8 adequate funding, we can deliver exceptional spaces.
9 From the Adams Street Library, our first new location
10 since 1983, to the upcoming openings of Brower Park
11 Library at the Brooklyn Children's Museum, the new
12 Brooklyn Heights Library in just a few weeks and the
13 renovated East Flatbush Library, we will have many
14 new libraries welcoming patrons back inside.

15 With your help, over the next few years we will
16 have been able to renovate a third of our branches.
17 Every great city deserves inspirational libraries. I
18 ask that as you determine the priorities for our
19 great city in the upcoming year, you continue to
20 invest in our society's most accessible, democratic
21 institutions, our public libraries. We can help the
22 city recover equitably if you help us remain strong
23 for all those who come through our doors and ensure
24 that those doors remain open wide for everyone.

25 Thank you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you Linda.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And we can just continue
4 right down line, so.

5 TONY MARX: Got it. Thank you and good morning.
6 My name is Tony Marx, I am the president of The New
7 York Public Library. It's an honor to be with you
8 and to follow Linda as always. I want to thank
9 Speaker Adams, the Chairs Brannan and Ossé, of course
10 the members of the Committee for inviting us to
11 testify. You have my written testimony. I will
12 summarize as rapidly as I can so we can all have as
13 much conversation as you would like.

14 Look, we all are painfully aware of how much
15 we've all been through with COVID and everything
16 else. The virus is diminishing, that is a great
17 blessing but its economic, social and other and
18 personal, psychological impacts I think will continue
19 to be with us and we need to continue to address and
20 of course the libraries are front and center as the
21 most visited civic institutions in addressing all of
22 those needs.

23 We aren't just restoring our prepandemic service,
24 we're also preserving and adding to aspects of our
25 digital efforts, which have been monumental,

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2 enhancing our collections with a concern to meeting
3 the real interests and needs of all of the diversity
4 of New York and implementing our youth and education
5 agenda. In effect doing two and a half things on one
6 x budget and that is a recurring theme. We are of
7 course delighted that the Mayor's FY23 Executive
8 Budget does not include a cut for libraries but the
9 fact is as you've already heard eloquently from
10 Linda, we have to do more and we need the resources
11 to be able to do more. We need to support our
12 amazing staff in particular who are really the front
13 line for New York through this time and going
14 forward.

15 Our current priorities have informed our FY23
16 Expense Budget request for the Council's non-
17 baselined FY22 \$14 million allocation as you've heard
18 and an additional \$15.7 million in new priority
19 library needs. New York public libraries focus
20 continues to be on youth and education with an
21 emphasis on teens. We know that particular
22 communities have been disproportionately impacted by
23 the virus and all the economics and health and
24 security issues around that. We have to keep working
25 on that. We have to be focused on the widening gaps

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2 in New York in terms of opportunities to learn and
3 advance, which we have to address.

4 We know that this begins at early ages, so we
5 start with early literacy, starting at birth, story
6 time, family literacy workshops, PreK for All
7 partnerships. Over close to three quarters of one
8 million attendees in these programs in 2019 and
9 building back up at this point. Then we move as the
10 kids get older, as our kids get older, to after
11 school.

12 In 2021 we launched a new drop in after school
13 program in 20 locations, so that our students, not
14 just those who benefit from schools with their own
15 after school programs but all students, equalizing
16 opportunity can come in particularly in the
17 marginalized communities and get free homework help,
18 tutoring, career and college exploration and so much
19 more. We start with our stem efforts because we know
20 that those help to attract teens. We see that in
21 record numbers and it's really just incredible. In
22 addition to those spaces and programs, we have teen
23 reading ambassadors who are paid high school interns,
24 because we know our students learn as much from
25 teaching as from being taught. We all know that.

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2 You know, in this day and age, we have to provide
3 snacks. Not because we're in the food security
4 business but because our teens and kids are coming to
5 our programs hungry.

6 In the first months, in the first six months NYPL
7 after school offered 1,200 programs to 8,700
8 attendees and as I say, we are continuing to build
9 towards more locations, at least ten additional
10 locations to be added. In terms of then focusing on
11 teens following and lots of conversations with the
12 administration that this needs to be a focus for us.
13 To provide holistic services for teens, so teen
14 centers. Starting with our flagship here at the
15 Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library, uhm, which is
16 just bursting with life, particularly after school.
17 It's just incredible in a neighborhood that isn't
18 residential particularly. Kids are coming for all
19 kinds of programs. We are planning this summer to
20 launch seven additional ones, Wakefield, Woodstock,
21 Van Cortlandt, Grand Concourse in the Bronx; Countee
22 Cullen and Bloomingdale in Manhattan; West New
23 Brighton in Staten Island. We are continuing to
24 build our college and career pathways to come out of
25 those teen activities and to you know grab the kids

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2 while we have them and move them forward. We have
3 monthly workshops, all of that. And then of course
4 as we know, as our teens get older, we have to
5 continue to serve them or serve them throughout.

6 An important new initiative for us is the Center
7 for Educators and Students, where we're taking all of
8 our collections, 55 million items. In particular,
9 our treasures and saying, let us get kids or all the
10 students of New York to come in and see and then put
11 curriculums out and teaching plans and work with
12 teachers and get the primary documents that we have
13 out into the digitally out into the classrooms.

14 Of course Schomburg plays a huge role in that
15 with its curriculum project as well as our summer
16 learning programs. This summer, in particular, we're
17 going to give out a half a million books because we
18 know that the kids in the poor neighborhood don't
19 even have personal libraries at home and that's an
20 important part of redressing imbalances. And as you
21 all know, we eliminated fines as an aggressive way to
22 try to say we need everyone reading, not blocked from
23 reading.

24 We of course maintain our adult education
25 programs ESOL, career counseling, tech connect, tax

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2 prep, book clubs, so much more. And then, as Linda
3 has already said, there remains our capital needs
4 because all this has to take place in spaces that are
5 not falling apart.

6 So, we have whether it's renovating an existing
7 space or building a new one, all of this of course
8 makes a difference for the usage of the library that
9 we all want to see. We know for instance, when we
10 renovated Woodstock, we saw a dramatic increase in
11 use. Similarly in Washington Heights, Charleston,
12 all these great projects, when you build it, they
13 will come and when you build it beautifully they will
14 be inspired and feel welcome.

15 We look forward to the anticipated complication
16 of five Carnegie branches, Melrose, Hunts Point, Fort
17 Washington, 125th and Port Richmond. As well as the
18 completion of our new Inwood Library which has 177,
19 100 percent affordable units right on top. I'm
20 particularly proud of that having grown up in Inwood,
21 that was my home branch, so that's wonderful to see.

22 We're of course grateful to the Mayor for the \$40
23 million in capital to the New York Public Library in
24 the Executive Budget. Though I have to note that
25 about more than one-third of that is already eaten up

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2 by shortfalls which goes to the conversations that
3 continue in terms of DDC and the issues of capital
4 management for the city, which we all need to do a
5 better job of. I think we all recognize that. We
6 have identified close to \$300 million in continued
7 systemic capital needs. We need complete renovations
8 in Edenwald, West New Brighton, Francis Martin,
9 Spuyten Duyvil, Countee Cullen. We need to continue
10 the good repairs projects HVAC, all the wonderful
11 things that Linda described. Our technology updates
12 and of course the shortfalls which we hope we can get
13 rid of as a systemic problem going forward.

14 We ask the Speaker and the City Council to
15 support the three systems with an additional \$35
16 million in capital funding, \$15 million for the three
17 boroughs of the New York Public Library. Uhm, we
18 also will continue to urge the inclusion of the
19 libraries in the city's ten year capital plan. It
20 happened historically in 2016. It meant we could
21 plan, it meant we could get it done and we need to
22 continue that otherwise we simply cannot be affective
23 or efficient in managing the city's resources and the
24 libraries resources for you.

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2 In conclusion, libraries through this difficult
3 period have never wavered. We continue to proudly be
4 your forefront partners in every neighborhood. We
5 know we need to focus on those neighborhoods that
6 have been disproportionately affected and we are not
7 shying away from being explicit about that targeting.
8 Whether it's story time, the centers for educators
9 and students afterschool, teen centers, we know that
10 the city's students and all citizens can rely on us.
11 Can count on us and we know and hope that we can
12 count on your continued and valuable essential
13 partnership so that we can all work together to meet
14 the city's needs going forward. Thank you Mr.
15 Chairs.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you Tony.

17 NICK BURON: Good morning. I am Nick Buron,
18 Chief Librarian and Senior Vice President at the
19 Queens Public Library. Thank you, Chairs Brannan and
20 Ossé, Speaker Adams, and the members of these
21 esteemed committee, both committees, for the
22 opportunity to speak with you today about our budget
23 priorities for Fiscal Year 2023.

24 On behalf of the Library and our President & CEO
25 Dennis Walcott, it is a pleasure to be here. I would

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2 like to thank Mayor Adams and his administration for
3 their thoughtful consideration of libraries in the
4 Fiscal Year 2023 Executive Budget. QPL received
5 \$26.5 million in earmarked of capital funding for
6 three branches in need of renovations. This
7 investment represents the Administration's
8 understanding that safe and modern spaces are vital
9 to the people and communities that these libraries
10 serve.

11 When I testified before at the Library Committee
12 in March, I stated that QPL had a need of \$270
13 million over the next ten years to bring all of the
14 libraries in our system into a state of good repair,
15 as well as the need for reliable and consistent
16 capital funding. As important as Mayoral funding is,
17 the capital funding that the Speaker and the City
18 Council provide to libraries at budget adoption is
19 just as important. The Mayor's and City Council's
20 capital investments in libraries over the last
21 several years have had a significant and positive
22 impact on the state of our facilities. Your
23 continued support is critical.

24 Therefore, we look forward to continuing to work
25 with the administration and the City Council to

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2 address the additional capital needs we still have.

3 We are extremely grateful for the Council's
4 consideration of QPL's \$10 million unrestricted
5 capital funding request. QPL did not receive any new
6 operating funds in the Fiscal Year 2023 Executive
7 Budget. We have shared with the administration the
8 significance of Queens's, New York and Brooklyn's
9 Tri-Li collective operating ask of \$15.7 million in
10 new funding \$4 million for which would be dedicated
11 to QPL.

12 As New Yorkers continue to recover from the
13 COVID-19 pandemic, the libraries are committed to be
14 here for them. We must be able to meet the growing
15 demand for digital content and address critical
16 infrastructure issues in a timely fashion. Having
17 the funding to resolve issues before they became
18 major capital problems means our doors stay open to
19 the public and more resources are available to
20 provide robust core services to the many people who
21 rely on libraries to find success in their lives.

22 During the Preliminary Budget hearing, I also
23 discussed how important it is for the City Council to
24 act to reauthorize, at minimum, its \$14 million
25 Library Initiative, of which QPL would receive \$3.9

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2 million. This funding is essential, especially given
3 the current economic situation of high inflation and
4 serious supply chain delays plaguing many industries.
5 It allows us to address non-capitally eligible and
6 critical maintenance projects across the system at
7 locations such as Corona, Flushing, Woodside and
8 Rosedale. This initiative has also supported
9 staffing levels, allowing us to hire security guards,
10 funded afterschool programming, and allowed us to
11 purchase new materials, including learning software
12 for our HSE and ESOL students.

13 Every day, we transform lives by cultivating
14 intellectual and personal growth. A recent student
15 of ours, Amairani Grajales, shared her Citizenship
16 class experience with us. She was extremely thankful
17 to have been able to enroll in free courses and
18 receive assistance from a trusted institution. She
19 complimented her instructor, Mr. Julian, on his
20 professionalism and enjoyed the online interaction
21 with her peers. With their support and after
22 diligent preparation, she took and passed the
23 citizenship exam. She described the great pride she
24 experienced as a result, and I am proud to announce
25

2 that Ms. Grajales' Oath Ceremony took place on
3 February 5, 2022.

4 Rakibuddin Khan and her daughter Sabahat were
5 struggling when they first arrived in Queens from
6 Bangladesh in 2015. When they discovered Queens
7 Public Library, they found caring staff to help.
8 Sabahat attended our free Kick-off to Kindergarten
9 program, where she built relationships with her
10 teachers and peers and prepared for school in a new
11 country.

12 Ms. Khan credits the library with helping her
13 learn how to better manage her finances. As she put
14 it, "I learned a lot of things about how life can be
15 changed. Even if you want very little, you have to
16 know how to secure your future. That is what I
17 learned from the library." Now, Ms. Khan continues
18 visiting the library to borrow reading materials in
19 her native language, as well as books on financial
20 management and world economies. Sabahat visits to
21 learn more about her Bangla culture through bilingual
22 story times and participate in STEM activities. They
23 credit the great staff, Ms. Bri and Ms. Salma Islam,
24 for guiding and helping them whenever they are in
25 need.

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2 Daymien, a student at Martin Van Buren High
3 School, has been attending the Cambria Heights
4 Library since he was in the eighth grade. Over the
5 years, he has come to view the library as his own
6 space where he can learn new things and concentrate
7 on subjects that interest him, such as video games
8 and graphic design. He considers the next phase of
9 his educational journey, Daymien credits the teen
10 center staff, Ms. Amanda, Ms. Chantel and Ms. Sherry,
11 for helping him think about college and realizing his
12 interest in graphic design. He describes them as
13 family, calling them his "Power Rangers" team as they
14 have their unique way of helping him with things such
15 as understanding the college process, learning
16 technology or participating in new programming.
17 According to Daymien, the Cambria Heights Library has
18 made him "more outgoing and more comfortable" with
19 who he is as an individual and, because of that, he
20 will never forget the staff at the library.

21 These individuals give voice to the millions of
22 people who rely on their local public libraries for
23 free, trustworthy and vital resources, programming,
24 and information. We are the center of our
25 communities. Strong libraries build strong

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2 communities, and an investment in New York's public
3 libraries is an investment in all New Yorkers. For
4 the Library to meet the needs of our patrons,
5 especially those who are most vulnerable, we
6 respectfully ask for your continued financial support
7 and ask that you prioritize QPL and New York City's
8 libraries in the Adopted Fiscal Year 2023 Budget.
9 Chairs Brannan and Ossé, thank you for the
10 opportunity to testify today.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you Nick. Okay,
12 thank you Nick, Linda and Tony, I appreciate that. I
13 appreciate everyone who summarized their remarks, we
14 have a long hearing today.

15 So, let's just jump right into it and before we
16 begin, I just want to acknowledge that the Committee
17 may not get to all of our questions or we might not
18 have all the responses but we certainly don't
19 anticipate that, so either way we'll send a follow-up
20 letter for any of the unanswered questions, which
21 will help in our budget negotiation. So, the Council
22 urged the Administration to add \$163 million in
23 capital dollars at FY23 for library repair and
24 maintenance to bridge the current gap in capital
25 funding for the systems ongoing infrastructure needs.

2 A handful of projects with shortfalls in funding
3 received additional dollars in the Executive Capital
4 plan. Even though OMB added money, for some projects
5 for shortfalls in the first four years of that plan
6 period, they also pushed out more from those years
7 into the back end of the ten year plan.

8 Is the capital funding allocated adequate for the
9 Fiscal Year and if not, how much is the remaining
10 shortfall for each of the three systems. Whoever
11 wants to take that first.

12 You want to go Linda? Tony?

13 LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, I'm happy to go, I'm just
14 checking my numbers thanks. So, we got \$20 million
15 but only \$5 million of that actually hits in Fiscal
16 Year 2023. And so, and as you point out correctly,
17 often when we receive a good tranche of money, it's
18 back ended and so, we actually suffer in the first
19 year and that's exactly what's happening this time.

20 TONY MARX: So, Mr. Chair we have \$296 million of
21 needs in the four years. We've got \$40 million, so
22 you can do the math yourself. Again, a lot of this
23 will depend as well as getting into the ten year
24 capital plan and none of this calculates in the
25 shortfalls that we always end up having to add to the

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2 costs, to the bottom line costs until we can solve
3 the DDC system problem.

4 NICK BURON: So, in Fiscal Year '22, you know we
5 - we have expenditures of \$23.9 million which were
6 used to bridge the funding gaps of active capital
7 projects but according to DDC's April report, the
8 just report that just came out, we have four
9 locations that still currently have shortfalls
10 including Astoria, Queens Village, Ratchada Village
11 and Queensborough Hill which account for over \$2.5
12 million.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, and how do the
14 systems, I guess how do each of your systems address
15 and prioritize all the ongoing capital projects?

16 LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, the question makes me smile
17 because we do a lot of work planning but because
18 we're underfunded, we actually end up more often than
19 not being reactive and ditching the plan because
20 there is some kind of emergency that needs to be
21 addressed immediately and so, while you know the plan
22 is terrific, if there's a systems problem in a branch
23 that's preventing us to operate, we'll focus our
24 money there.

25

2 TONY MARX: Totally agree and you can see this
3 for yourselves. When you know we get insufficient
4 you know sort of dribs and drabs, we end up spending
5 those. In fact, they don't cover the sort of
6 emergency needs that are band-aids that don't get us
7 ahead of the problem.

8 When on the other hand, the city gives us for
9 instance \$100 million in the ten year capital plan,
10 we could not only - we could systematically address
11 five huge historic Carnegies and we chose you know
12 the neighborhoods most in needs. That's part of the
13 prioritization at this point as well as you know the
14 physical demands. Then we were able to do that and
15 get a head of it, so we won't end up spending money
16 on band-aids and because we could plan, we could
17 negotiate with EDC instead of DDC, getting those
18 projects done for the citizens at half the cost and
19 roughly half the time that would otherwise - so
20 everyone benefits.

21 So, it's really there's sort of two extremes.
22 There's the you know the emergencies that suck up
23 money and don't get us ahead of the game and just you
24 know, we keep try - we're sort of swimming in place
25 if that. Uhm, as versus giving us the resources so

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2 we can plan, deal with it, get it done at half the
3 price and then it doesn't have to be redone in dribs
4 and drabs and band-aids.

5 NICK BURON: Absolutely correct and that's why
6 public libraries need consistent unrestricted capital
7 funding. Without increase in stable funding, it
8 leads to a reduction and scope, delays, postponements
9 and cancelation sometimes of capital projects, right.
10 Because we're playing this game quite often and you
11 know when we're dealing with a - what DDC has given
12 us a calendar of eight years for a project, a lot
13 happens in eight years when you know whether that's
14 inflation, hidden costs or unexpected delays.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah, big time.

16 TONY MARX: Mr. Chair, can I just say, apologies.
17 Of our \$296 million estimate of systemwide needs,
18 roughly again, \$130 million of that is budgeted
19 because of project shortfalls. We're chasing our own
20 tail here. If we had the sufficient funding upfront,
21 we wouldn't need to be doing that kind of work on the
22 backend.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Right.

24 LINDA JOHNSON: I'll just add one thing that
25 everyone has spoken very eloquently about the problem

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2 both in terms of current year and you know sort of
3 planning and ten year, uh, on the ten year plan. But
4 the most egregious thing that happens is when we have
5 shortfalls on emergency projects that can't wait, we
6 end up dipping into operating funds to make sure the
7 project continues to move forward and then you start
8 to see a diminishing in the quality and the level of
9 service that's being provided.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Sure, understood. So, the
11 three systems projected Fiscal '23 Expense Budget of
12 \$419.1 million represents less than one percent of
13 the city's proposed budget on \$99.7 billion. Is this
14 funding adequate for the fiscal year? If not, what's
15 the shortfall of the three systems for FY23?

16 LINDA JOHNSON: You know you'll never find any
17 one of us saying that our budget's adequate. So, but
18 in this year in particular, we are all facing this
19 challenge of continuing to move forward with the
20 progress we made on the digital fronts as well as
21 continuing to offer the all-important services that
22 we provide in our branches and it's really like,
23 trying to maintain the digital enterprise. The
24 bricks and mortar business is running two businesses
25 and yet we have the same budget that we've always had

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2 and the digital stuff isn't going away nor should it
3 be but the more traditional services really can't be
4 ignored. They provide vital community glue, not to
5 mention serve a population that wants to be attending
6 programs in person borrowing hard copy books and all
7 of this is at the very core of what we do. So, how
8 we manage going forward is still sort of a work in
9 process but we've identified \$15.7 million of
10 additional need that the systems will have just in
11 the next fiscal year to continue to move forward with
12 that progress. That includes you know expanding our
13 digital collections. Hiring the appropriate level of
14 staff and just continuing to expand our hours to the
15 extent that that's needed.

16 TONY MARX: Again, I'll reiterate as Linda said,
17 I mean the \$14 million restoration of city capital
18 funds is basically with out that. We have a huge
19 hole in our ability to just continue to operate and
20 we would have to adjust accordingly. I think we can
21 all agree that that's unthinkable or should be
22 unthinkable and then again, three systems, \$15.7
23 million of new funds. For us, the primary uses of
24 that are the library materials that continue to need
25 to be upgraded, both electronically and analog.

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2 The noncapital eligible facilities and technology
3 costs, that is an essential piece of flexibility. We
4 just don't want it to become the whole thing because
5 then it gets crazy as Linda and Nick describe. As
6 well as small, for instance the Inwood temporary
7 space. I mean, that's you know a relatively small
8 again in coordination with the Council.

9 NICK BURON: At the risk of repeating, only
10 because the priority is so great on this question
11 that you've asked Chair that the reauthorization of
12 that \$14 million is critical. Of which, Queens
13 Public Library would receive 3.9 and it would also
14 allow us to address non capitally eligible, critical
15 maintenance that as Linda pointed out, without that,
16 shuts down branches for six months just for something
17 that we could otherwise have done very quickly with
18 limited disruption. But it also supports staffing
19 levels, programs, materials but we're asking the
20 administration, as you heard for \$15.7 million
21 additional, which for us at Queens Public Library
22 would be \$4 million for enhanced digital and print
23 collection and to address increasing critical
24 maintenance and repairs and more.

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2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, FY22, the Council
3 allocated a one-time funding of \$14 million that was
4 split between the three systems. Can you tell us how
5 that funding was used?

6 TONY MARX: Can do that. So, we received \$6.188
7 million of that \$14 million. We spent \$3.442 on
8 library materials again, both e and analog. \$2.576
9 on facilities, maintenance and cleaning of the sort
10 you've heard and the \$170,000 for rent and utilities
11 in the Inwood temporary space while we build the new
12 branch there with 175 units of affordable housing on
13 top.

14 NICK BURON: For us at Queens, \$1.5 million of
15 that went to contract security guards. You know, the
16 interaction with the public to ask them politely to
17 you know to wear their masks and to be able to you
18 know interact with the public really needed us to
19 have that barrier between our frontline staff at
20 times. But also, wedge to a quarter million dollars
21 towards PPE that we had to keep buying but also it
22 was used for signage, communications equipment,
23 community outreach went for that money. The
24 increased learning software for high school
25 equivalency and ESOL classes, uhm stacks etc..

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2 LINDA JOHNSON: In Brooklyn we spent money on the
3 19 public service positions, \$1 million for
4 collections, money for programs, and then a lot of
5 that money went to building issues.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, just one more question
7 and I'm going to hand it over to my Co-Chairs. At
8 the preliminary hearing, a lot of my colleagues
9 expressed concern over library staff resignations.
10 Have the systems seen any reversal of this?

11 LINDA JOHNSON: We have not and because we are in
12 the process or in this moment sustaining a cut until
13 the next fiscal year in July, we're not hiring
14 either. So, this is a significant problem for us.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And what were the, in
16 Brooklyn what were most of the resignations due to?

17 LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, it's all over the board.
18 There are people who retired early. I think it's - I
19 can't be terribly specific but I think it's what's
20 happening across all sectors.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Sure.

22 LINDA JOHNSON: Leaving the city, reevaluating
23 their lives, deciding that they don't want to you
24 know to work any longer and leaving early. We tend
25

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2 to have a very long serving staff, so this is an
3 unusual phenomenon for us.

4 TONY MARX: So, we are, we are currently
5 recruiting for 140 staff positions, that is partly
6 sort of regular turnover but we see it increased for
7 the reasons described.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And are those all in-person
9 physical? Are there remote positions?

10 TONY MARX: They are all physical positions. You
11 know we're a public service organization, so we're
12 here and you know we uh, I talked to folks in the
13 private sector and they describe the great
14 resignation as people not feeling sufficient purpose
15 in their activities, at least as a big part. That's
16 not our issue to be honest. You know our folks feel
17 the you know pressing-ness of what we do for the
18 public you know front and center. I think to be
19 honest, it's what we can afford to pay our folks as
20 well as, how stretched they feel when there are
21 insufficient bodies in the positions that we need and
22 you know, we have to address that with our budget and
23 to be honest by hoping and encouraging the city to
24 make a — to come to a new contract with DC37, so that

25

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2 we can make sure that you know the unionized members
3 of our essential workforce are being adequately paid.

4 NICK BURON: That's absolutely correct because
5 you know while we had tick up in retirements and that
6 did increase, really we doubled the number of
7 separations that we had that we experienced. And in
8 Fiscal Year '21 we had 98 on our attrition compared
9 to usually like somewhere in the 50's. So, about
10 twice as many but the key thing is, is that during
11 those times, we weren't hiring.

12 So, for us it was cumulative between you know
13 fiscal year '21 and then fiscal year '22 and only
14 now, you know on a good month, maybe starting in
15 February have we seen maybe a couple of less people
16 go out than we're actually bringing in. So, we are
17 recruiting for 114 positions right now to try to
18 bring into the library and that is critical and
19 they're all you know, almost exclusively public
20 facing full-time positions that we need to get in
21 order to provide the service to our community.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Linda, Nick,
23 Tony, I appreciate it. I'm going to hand it over now
24 to my Co-Chair Councilman Ossé. Thank you so much.

25 LINDA JOHNSON: Thank you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you Chair Brannan and
3 good morning again Nick, Linda and Tony. Always a
4 pleasure seeing you, even if it is over Zoom. The
5 first questions that I want to ask are in regards to
6 the new budgetary items. You know one of the new
7 increases in the executive budget for libraries is
8 the heat, light and water subsidy. How will you all
9 use the subsidy and how will it benefit the systems?

10 TONY MARX: Mr. Chair, I will check but it's my
11 understanding that you know the raised subsidy is
12 basically to cover the raised costs and that the city
13 is covering our energy costs. We just you know, even
14 though we don't have maybe the right systemic
15 incentives, we also try to be much more sustainable
16 and efficient. Our buildings increasingly are
17 designed for that and getting awards etc., but it's
18 basically you know, prices are going up. We all see
19 it at the gas tank or wherever or the electric bill
20 and you know we need those fundings to cover that so
21 it doesn't need into everything else.

22 LINDA JOHNSON: I would just add that in the case
23 of Brooklyn Public Library, we have a few new
24 branches that have come online. And so, heat, power
25 and light has now kicked in for the Center for

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2 Brooklyn History, the former Brooklyn Historical
3 Society. The Brooklyn Heights branch which has been
4 offline for a few years is coming back and we opened
5 a new library in Vinegar Hill, Dumbo Farragut House
6 Neighborhood. So, that's a new facility as well. We
7 have another one coming on line in the months ahead
8 in Brower Park at the Brooklyn Children's Museum as
9 well as south site in the cultural uh, corridor in
10 Brooklyn.

11 NICK BURON: And Chair, well, you know we very
12 much want to participate in you know green energy and
13 you know our new buildings taking on better energy
14 efficiency. In the end, you know the City of New
15 York pays our bills. You know, and so, for us, it's
16 there's not much of a savings here.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And the other new increase in
18 the executive budget is for Action NYC and how will
19 the increase allocation for this program be used?

20 Nick, why don't we start with you this time.

21 NICK BURON: Well, quite honestly it was one time
22 funding and so, what we need is, we need it to be you
23 know reauthorized in order to be able to bring that
24 back in as well.

25

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2 TONY MARX: Agreed and it's not huge amounts but
3 it's important and it's particularly important
4 because as we know, the libraries are the first port
5 of call for the immigrant communities. They have
6 been for 25 years and that seems more pressing.

7 LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, that's exactly what I was
8 going to add, it's more pressing now than ever. You
9 know, immigration insecurity, status insecurity is a
10 serious issue and we are seeing an uptick in people
11 coming to the library because they feel safe and
12 welcome and they can get the information they need.

13 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And just to push you guys a
14 little further, how in particular do you think the
15 increased allocation or one time payment will be used
16 for this program?

17 TONY MARX: I'll confess, I'm going to need to
18 get back to you Mr. Chair on that to dive into the
19 details.

20 LINDA JOHNSON: We're using the money in Brooklyn
21 for a staff position at our call center.

22 NICK BURON: For us it did fund one staff person
23 and again, we do make the referrals but in short,
24 it's critical as you heard from Linda and Tony, that
25 now more than ever our customers are really coming

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2 in. As you know, you know 50 percent of our borough
3 was born outside of the United States and we have
4 people coming all the time into Queens and they need
5 these service desperately. So, thank you for
6 bringing it up Chair Ossé.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Absolutely and go ahead.

8 TONY MARX: I was just going to say, sorry, so we
9 use this both to add to the materials. For instance,
10 we have new American corners in every branch. That's
11 important but you know you can't just have the
12 materials. This is the lesson of the library. You
13 got to have staff who can help make that material
14 make sense, make it available, promote it, explain
15 it, and so, we have outreach assistance on that
16 budget as well and we'd like to continue that of
17 course.

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And are there any other
19 specific library programs that could use additional
20 funding and Linda, I obviously know you know your
21 answer on this, there is no such thing in the library
22 systems as too much money but in particular for
23 programs, where could we see an increase in funds?
24 Or where could your system see an increase in funds
25 to benefit our city?

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2 LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, I think you know in terms
3 of our priorities at the moment, we're focused very
4 much on making sure that we are attracting and
5 keeping teams involved in the library system as long
6 as they can and trying to combine the importance of
7 spaces for teams with the importance of learning tech
8 skills and so, that's the sort of tool that we're
9 using to bring teams in and to keep them engaged.

10 And then, the other thing, which is more purely a
11 tech play, is our digital navigators trying to get
12 people into the neighborhoods to help communities
13 learn with the benefits that are out there and
14 available to them even though they are incredibly
15 difficult to tap into and to fully understand. So, I
16 would say teams and technology.

17 NICK BURON: Teams is huge. Adult education is
18 very big but outreach is also big for us too. The
19 City Council and the Administration have been very
20 good at being able to authorize good outreach
21 services including our outreach to Rikers Island
22 through reentry to justice involved people and you
23 know we were able to have you know the American
24 Library Association called out on movers and shakers
25 that it's great that all three libraries were able to

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2 have a mover and shaker which is a prestigious honor
3 and ours actually came from our outreach services
4 where you know serving outreach to the incarcerated
5 and formerly incarcerated. So, it's a program that
6 we're big on. That we're good at and more funding
7 would actually create more opportunities for those
8 that are in most need.

9 TONY MARX: Mr. Chair, I think we are all in
10 heated agreement here and in a heated agreement with
11 you and with the Administration. Now of course, now
12 let's see where we all land and the heated agreement
13 is simply, you know there's so many needs but you
14 know we are focusing on teens. We understand the
15 crucial moment for those of our kids, of our fellow
16 citizens going forward. The teen centers, the use of
17 technology as uh, not only as bait if you will but as
18 an essential set of tools that you know bring the
19 students in but that they need and that coordinates
20 with afterschool, right. Suddenly the afterschool
21 seems interesting because it helps you understand the
22 technology and the fun stuff you want to do in the
23 music studio or what have you and then you know, we
24 also have an additional responsibility because of the
25 research library. Because we have the most used

2 research library on the planet. We have all these
3 amazing treasures that we want to get out into every
4 classroom digitally. We want to get every school
5 student to come in and visit our treasures exhibit.
6 I mean these are, you know this a way to sort of grab
7 our students and really you know open the world for
8 them.

9 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you for those answers
10 and I just want to Segway into programming as a
11 whole. You know at the preliminary budget hearing,
12 the systems mentioned that there is a lot of pent up
13 demand in need for library services. How have the
14 systems tweaked programs to make them more readily
15 available post pandemic?

16 NICK BURON: Well, you know we started you know
17 with doing you know in February of 2020, for us at
18 the Queens Public Library, everything was in person.
19 It was you know how it always was. Within a couple
20 of months, everything was virtual and you know kudos
21 to our team for being able to make that transition
22 that we've been able to sustain really, really well.

23 Well, now, as we've said you know in previous
24 testimony, now, we're being asked to do both. It's
25 not one or the other, it's being able to do in-person

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2 programming on an increasing level at the same time,
3 providing virtual programming, which is fantastic
4 because we realize that there is an audience for
5 both. But as I believe Tony said, you know that's
6 sort of you know that's two and a half times the
7 amount of programming that we were doing before and
8 we are welcoming to take on that challenge but that
9 challenge are two different sets of needs that need
10 to be funded accordingly in order to do that the best
11 we can.

12 LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, I would just add you know
13 in addition to maintaining the you know as I
14 explained earlier, the digital as well as the in-
15 person programming. We made a pig push to do more of
16 our work outdoors when whether permitted, including
17 you know building spaces in my - on my very property
18 as well as getting permits from DOT to sort of adopt
19 the restaurant model of building and using the
20 streets.

21 And that allowed us to bring people back sooner
22 than we otherwise would have been able to given the
23 social distancing requirements that we were dealing
24 with. You know unfortunately right now, you know
25 we're scaling back a little bit but you know it's

2 sort of a push to just keep monitoring what's going
3 on and building up our programming to full capacity,
4 whatever that might be at a given moment.

5 TONY MARX: Look, I think as Nick and Linda have
6 already said, you know we switched to digital and
7 that was incredible and we were ready and that was
8 incredible. And you now the New York Public, we
9 blend 13 million eBooks. I mean, that wouldn't have
10 happened and people would have basically been
11 without. So, that's an obvious you know addition and
12 tweak and we need to continue to build on that.

13 I'll give you another example Mr. Chair, which is
14 our after school program. Let me be clear, this is
15 based on \$100 million of privately raised money over
16 the last decade and we have said we will raise that
17 money to do this and to provide the service and
18 hopefully then partner with the city to sustain it
19 and build it. The tweak there was, just a learning
20 process. We started with separate - an enrollment
21 base you know 10 or 15 lucky kids who got selected
22 and they were in a separate room and it was ongoing
23 and regular and that was fabulous but we learned that
24 meant we couldn't address a much larger group of
25 folks and we were setting those programs aside and

2 making them not a part of our regular library
3 activities. Now, it's drop-in. The kids in the
4 neighborhood know that there will be tutors there
5 every afternoon and it happens in the kids and teens
6 centers, so it fills that with life and integrates
7 it. That's just - and it enables us to do more.
8 Again, that's just an example as we learn to do
9 better, as we move more into proactive education
10 programs because the city needs us to. We're
11 learning to do that better and to be honest, at some
12 point, private funds for us at least we'll not be
13 able to sustain this, right, and that's also part of
14 the ongoing discussions.

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you for your answer.

16 LINDA JOHNSON: I'll just add one, one point
17 maybe it is known to the Committee. And that is you
18 know this investment in digital material is much more
19 expensive than the investment in hard copy.
20 Sometimes as much as almost twice as much for each
21 title. And so, as we are working to increase service
22 by providing more digital content, it's coming at a
23 great expense.

24 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you for your answers and
25 as mentioned earlier, outreach is crucial to the

2 library scale and impact in the community. For
3 example, as you said Tony with the after school
4 program that you do. What outreach is used at the
5 moment to ensure as many communities, especially
6 those who are most impacted by the pandemic, are
7 aware of the services the libraries offer?

8 TONY MARX: So, look, outreach is key. Even
9 though we are the most used you know civic
10 institution, most visited civic institutions in town,
11 as is true across America, it's not enough. Even
12 though you know we have record numbers, it's still
13 not enough given the needs. And I think we're
14 particularly mindful of the inequalities in what
15 we're getting at. So, you know, if you look at the
16 average kid in the upper west side compared to the
17 average kid in the South Bronx, the kid in the South
18 Bronx is borrowing something like a third of the
19 number of books from us as they are on average on the
20 upper west side. And we know that those kids are
21 much less likely to have libraries at home and all
22 the other things that are essential. So, we have to
23 use electronics, you know digital you know outreach.
24 We have to literally, our librarians are going out to
25 schools, to homeless shelters, doing programs there,

2 bringing people in. We need to get creative about
3 this. I mean the teen center is part of our effort
4 to sort of bring that group in and then we can build
5 from that. So, for instance, come in, do the stem
6 work at the teen centers. Now we're starting to talk
7 about okay, how do we also maybe use this as an
8 option to get our teens involved in civic engagement
9 projects and local, you know how do we use the
10 libraries to help you all do your jobs, so that we
11 can gather our communities. They can come together
12 with what their pressing issues are. We can connect
13 them to you with office hours. You know etc., I mean
14 this is - we need this all to work better and
15 outreach is key for that.

16 LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, I would echo everything
17 that Tony has said about the importance of outreach.
18 It's at the core of what libraries do. We are
19 extremely aggressive about - I'll use the term
20 marketing because we are, we are marketing the
21 programs that we're offering and we're also uhm, I
22 lost my train of thought. Uhm, uh, -

23 TONY MARX: Can uh, I'll just jive in while you
24 get it. I mean look, this involves every office of
25 you know practically every office here. I mean, we

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2 have a marketing communications office. We have a
3 digital office. We have government affairs. I mean,
4 as well as you know the incredible staff and the
5 branches in the education work. This is what they're
6 doing.

7 LINDA JOHNSON: This is what we're doing and
8 perhaps, one of the most significant things that we
9 did during the pandemic or your know as the pandemic
10 was waning and we did this in part to make sure that
11 we would attract back as many people as we could, as
12 people had gotten out of the habit of coming to the
13 library, we wanted to ensure that we removed any
14 barriers that people might feel, real or imagined and
15 so, we eliminated fines. And that was aggressively
16 promoted and uhm, uh, eliminated any kind of fear
17 that people had about being shut out of the library
18 because their cards were put on hold for failure to
19 pay fines. It also created something robust that we
20 could talk about and promote.

21 NICK BURON: An outreach has two, two parts
22 really. It's going out to those that can't get to
23 the library but it's also going out to those who
24 don't know so much about the library to bring them
25 into the virtual and to the in-person resources. So,

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2 in Fiscal Year '21, we had you know over 450 outreach
3 events for over 35,000 people that we were able to
4 get to. Again, providing them with the resources,
5 working in partnership with CBO's. I had mentioned
6 our incarcerated outreach. That's to get to people
7 that clearly cannot get to the library. But then,
8 you know once back in their community, they're able
9 to know that trusting community. And so, when we go
10 to family you know, family shelters, you know who
11 might not otherwise have the time to go to the
12 library, we're making that connection so that we can
13 provide the resources to them. Whether that's
14 hotspots you know so that they can connect with the
15 resources, with the virtual resources and make it
16 known in someone's very busy, you know busy
17 challenging you know environment that you know what,
18 we are the resource for them to be able to use.

19 So, it is the social media. It is the marketing.
20 It's the partnerships with CBO's. It's using our big
21 mobile libraries and it's using, which we keep coming
22 back to, it is the staff behind this that makes those
23 vital connections. Sometimes one on one that really
24 makes the changes in peoples lives.

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2 LINDA JOHNSON: I'd just add one partner that
3 none of have mentioned but that we all rely heavily
4 on and that is the schools. And making sure that the
5 librarians and the principals and teachers are
6 working in concert with one another. Nothing is
7 better than a good librarian and a good principal in
8 close proximity to one another and make sure that
9 school age children learn about everything that's
10 there for them at the library.

11 TONY MARX: Mr. Chair, can I just reiterate one
12 of the points that was made by my colleagues. You
13 know just take the fines thing as an example. We
14 knew for years that it was not making - it was not
15 bringing the books back. They were coming back
16 anyway. New Yorkers understand the public good
17 system that we you know personify or embody.

18 But it was keeping those who most need to use the
19 library, the folks in the poorest neighborhoods, they
20 were not using the library because they were scared
21 of the fines and the collection agencies. And we did
22 you know amnesties, we proved the point, we came to
23 the city. We said, let's get rid of it. Help us
24 there's a revenue issue here and in the end, in the
25 pandemic, what did we do? We said, you know we can't

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2 argue about this anymore. We will do this right and
3 it will you know, whatever it costs, we need – and
4 its sort of incredible. We unblocked 400,000 people
5 in the City of New York, who we need to read, who we
6 were saying, we won't allow you to read. That's
7 craziness and just an example that we will rethink
8 our processes. We will rethink our budget. We will
9 push ourselves when we see ways to do that outreach
10 more effectively in particular, to keep our most
11 vulnerable citizens from feeling that the library is
12 somehow not theirs or available to them.

13 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And it seems like from today's
14 testimony, especially after Chair Brannan's question
15 and your answers, the systems do not have staff and
16 resources to meet the demand of these services. What
17 will it take to restart hiring staff and when hiring
18 begins again, what is the outreach for finding new
19 staffers for the systems? And just a follow up aside
20 from staff, what do the systems need to ensure the
21 demand of their operations are met?

22 LINDA JOHNSON: You know our business is really
23 all about staff. We spend an enormous percentage of
24 our budget on wages and it's what makes us able to
25 keep the doors open. So, I mean it's recruiting

2 staff, making sure that they are committed to the
3 work. They're doing it because it's a labor of love,
4 librarians and staff members are an incredible bunch
5 and so creating that sense that we all feel here,
6 that what we're doing is important and good work and
7 rewarding, in an environment that they enjoy being in
8 and of course, you know the pandemic has thrown a
9 monkey wrench into all of this because you know
10 people feel insecure about transportation, about you
11 know interacting with the public and it's just
12 something that we're trying to chip slowly away at.

13 NICK BURON: So, it has picked up a little bit,
14 you know we have been able to hire new staff. When I
15 say new staff, really it's librarians that are either
16 done with their master's education or in the process
17 of going for them and we, you know we hire them you
18 know sometimes while they're still in school in order
19 to provide opportunity for them and us. But I
20 believe it was Tony that said earlier, like really
21 it's a matter of being competitive.

22 We do not have competitive salaries compared to
23 libraries out on the island. It is that simple and
24 we have people that come to us for a couple of years
25 and then they go back. A lot of people come to the

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2 big city you know and work for our three systems and
3 have traditionally done that and then gone back to
4 you know to where they otherwise would be somewhere
5 else in the country. But losing people, you know
6 it's a matter of being able to retain this excellent
7 talent that we're able to get. So, it's not just a
8 matter of being able to hire the staff, which you
9 know our HR Departments are very good at. Our
10 reputations at all three systems, people want to work
11 with us. But it's retaining them and that is you
12 know, it's a matter of being you know being very
13 competitive on a national level and on a local level
14 to be able to retain these staff so that they can
15 invest in our communities with us.

16 LINDA JOHNSON: And just to bring this full
17 circle, this is exactly why we need the additional
18 funding. It's why being restored to where we were
19 before the pandemic hit is just not adequate.
20 There's obviously wage inflation and a need for more
21 people in order to continue to do more and I feel
22 that the city is eager for us to do more as we are
23 eager to provide additional service but it's only
24 going to happen if we're able to adequately staff up
25 and that is in fact why we're saying not just the \$14

2 million that we need restored from the previous
3 fiscal year but an additional \$15.7 million for the
4 three systems so that we can hire more.

5 TONY MARX: As my colleagues have said, I mean we
6 are currently searching hard for 140 staff positions.
7 The HR Department is doing amazing work. Again, it's
8 an outreach issue in part. I think going forward, if
9 I understand who this works, it's sort of a two part
10 system. We need you to say, we need more staffing
11 positions, support in the libraries. That's
12 important and we need the city and the Mayor to
13 negotiate with DC 37 so that the staffing level, the
14 salary levels are livable in New York. You can't
15 live on you now purpose. You also need enough
16 resources to live. And uhm, you need both I think.

17 So, you know, we understand that dynamic. We
18 need both of those and then I'll just add, we're also
19 very conscious of the sort of our role. I think it's
20 the largest youth employment funnel in the city, so
21 our Page program, which amazingly has produced
22 something like 60 percent of our frontline staff who
23 started its pages. That had been cut during the
24 pandemic for a bunch of obvious reasons. We not only
25 restored it but we're growing it. We're adding

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2 education programs and we're putting pages not just
3 in the branches but in our central administrative
4 offices, so that we get a pipeline to communications,
5 finance, budget what have you. All that is essential
6 also going forward.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

8 LINDA JOHNSON: I would just add for the record
9 that at Brooklyn Public Library, we are - we're
10 hiring or looking to hire 117 new employees.

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Wow. Okay, so to move onto my
12 last questions because I know that some of colleagues
13 have questions as well. I want to talk about you
14 know capital. The libraries commitment plan of
15 \$764.3 million comprised of less one percent of the
16 city's total 94.9 billion capital commitment plan for
17 Fiscal 2022-2026. What additional need do the
18 systems have in Fiscal 2023?

19 LINDA JOHNSON: I've been busy looking at this
20 over a longer horizon but just to bring up a few of
21 the projects that we are eager to get moving on in
22 the upcoming fiscal year. Borough Park has a \$20.7
23 million project commitment plan for a full
24 renovation. Brownsville has a \$27.2 million
25 commitment for a full renovation and Red Hook has

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2 \$14.4 million in the same four year horizon for a
3 full branch renovation.

4 NICK BURON: For this fiscal year, for fiscal
5 year 2023, we have \$98.6 million to address projected
6 project shortfalls as well as projects in need of
7 immediate capital attention.

8 TONY MARX: Sorry Mr. Chair, just looking at
9 various numbers. So, in terms of the breakdown of
10 our systems capital needs, again, for '23 - this was
11 '26-'26, we had a \$296 million and I can run through
12 those if you want. That includes the shortfalls.
13 But in FY23, it's \$53 million.

14 LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, I think maybe we're missing
15 the question. If you're looking at numbers that we
16 need just to do sort of the more you know maintenance
17 and repairs, in Brooklyn, we need an addition \$10
18 million to do, just you know to keep buildings in
19 good repair.

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSĚ: So, I guess the last question
21 that I do have, uhm, is something we've discussed
22 before and the libraries have also emphasized that
23 the preliminary budget hearing the need to be
24 regularly funded in the ten year capital plan, as is
25 customary for other city infrastructure and agencies.

2 Have the systems had a conversation with OMB
3 regarding this?

4 LINDA JOHNSON: I feel like we're at OMB all the
5 time. I shouldn't make light of it. Our staff does
6 a tremendous job working with OMB to make sure that
7 there's a deep understanding of what we need and why
8 we need it. You know it's an ongoing conversation.
9 It's constant and there's a lot of thoughtfulness
10 that goes on both sides.

11 TONY MARX: If I may, can I turn to Iris on this
12 one because she's really in the drivers seat?

13 IRIS WEINSHALL: Sure, thanks Tony. Uhm, yes, we
14 have had conversations with OMB as well as we started
15 to have conversations with City Hall. As most of you
16 have heard and the Presidents have testified for
17 years on end, it's very hard to plan a project when
18 you get capital money year by year. If you're not in
19 the ten year plan, then you can't do long term
20 planning for your projects. So, the answer is yes,
21 we have talked to OMB and yes, we are having
22 conversations with City Hall.

23 So, whether they're going to do next a five year
24 plan or a ten year plan, we will be part of that
25 conversation. The last time the libraries were in

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2 the ten year capital plan was 2015 and we each got
3 \$100 million. That allowed us for NYPL, I know the
4 other two systems can speak to what they have
5 planned. That allowed us to look at neighborhoods of
6 need and plan and start to construct five Carnegie
7 libraries.

8 So, we knew we were in the ten year plan. We
9 knew the money was there and it allowed us to do
10 those projects.

11 NICK BURON: Iris has said it perfectly and we
12 use that money to spread across the borough to what
13 was needed. I can't even imagine if we had gotten
14 \$100 million next year and the next year that we
15 would have been able to really have great impact on
16 the communities that these libraries serve. So, in
17 short, we are asking the city and OMB on an ongoing
18 basis.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. Well, those are
20 all of my questions for you all. I know my
21 colleagues have questions but thank you for your
22 answers and for attending this hearing today.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chairs Brannan and
24 Ossé. For the record, we've also been joined by
25 Council Members Richardson Jordan, Sanchez, Moya,

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2 Brewer, Hudson, Barron, Hanif, Carr, Joseph, Ayala
3 and Powers. And to start off for questions, Council
4 Member Barron.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Well, thank you very
7 much. I just want to thank all the presidents for
8 their presentation, particularly the President of the
9 New York Brooklyn Public Library who we have a great
10 relationship with. You know I have more of a message
11 to us as Council Members than the Presidents. I
12 noticed that in our questioning of them, they were
13 struggling to answer questions with meager resources,
14 with not enough resources but still trying to make it
15 work. So, every time we say, how did you use this or
16 what are you going to do with that, they honestly
17 don't want to say that this is ridiculous. That we
18 have a \$94.9 billion capital budget and that we're
19 sitting and trying to keep healthy one of the most
20 important institutions in our community, our
21 libraries.

22 Cultural programs come out of there. Community
23 organizing comes out of our libraries. Community
24 safety plans come out of our libraries. Civic and
25 political education comes out of our libraries.

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2 Community-based organizations looking for space comes
3 out of our libraries. PPE during COVID came out of
4 our libraries.

5 Reentry programs for those who were formerly
6 incarcerated comes out of our libraries. Leaders are
7 readers comes out of our libraries. Job readiness,
8 after school programs, youth employment, education
9 programs and the cultural programs in the Black
10 community of Kwanzaa and Juneteenth come right out of
11 our libraries. These are the most valuable
12 institutions along with education and health, it is
13 our libraries. These are not just edifices that have
14 books in it for you to come read. It's far beyond
15 that.

16 So, my message to the Council Members is to say
17 come on now, we said \$163 million, a request for
18 capital money and the mayor comes up with \$50 million
19 and we're saying okay, that's uh you know, you can't
20 get everything you want. Sure you can. We're not
21 asking for everything. But out of a \$94.9 billion
22 budget, guess what? They have \$6.9 billion for
23 neighborhood jails. \$6.9 billion for jails and we
24 can't give up billions for libraries and these jails
25 are pre-trial detainees who need to be out, not the

2 lies that they're telling you about no cash bail and
3 they come out and commit more crimes. We're talking
4 about no cash bail for those who are for minor
5 offences, non-violent minor offences. We don't need
6 \$6.9 billion for jails.

7 So, I just want to encourage my colleagues, we
8 have the power to pass the budget, not the Mayor.
9 The Mayor does not pass the budget, he presents it to
10 us. And I'm hoping we can go forward and say, listen
11 Mayor, this is unacceptable for libraries. I've been
12 on this Finance Committee for all the hearings. You
13 have too. \$1 billion cut from education. Cuts from
14 the libraries. A cut from the youth services, for
15 seniors. How low can you go? Cutting the aging
16 program. All of these cuts, why is that happening
17 when we have \$7.1 billion in reserve funds?

18 Now I understand budgets because I've been
19 through 12 of them. Reserve funds are for the outer
20 years. Yes, you're going to have outer year problems
21 and then a portion of that is for rainy day services.
22 Well Mayor, it's raining today, so we got to deal
23 with today's rain and tomorrow's rain. And right
24 now, it's raining on our libraries and they need a
25 financial umbrella and I say, we, the City Council,

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2 whether the Mayor likes it or not, we the City
3 Council should stand for our libraries, our schools
4 and not support an austerity budget that conversely
5 cuts when it's really not necessary.

6 This is unconscionable and totally unnecessary
7 and I'm hoping my colleagues, I'm talking to you more
8 than the presidents because their trying their best.
9 I'm talking to us. We got to stand strong this time
10 around and say presidents, you answered all our
11 questions, now we're going to say when it comes to
12 negotiations, you will be a priority. Thank you.

13 LINDA JOHNSON: Thank you Council Member Barron.
14 Could not say it better.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16 LINDA JOHNSON: I could not have a better partner
17 than you in all of this and I would just like to
18 mention that in the Councilman's district, there's a
19 library that's in bad need of renovation and
20 together, we've put money aside to make that it gets
21 the attention that it needs and it's been done very
22 thoughtfully over a period of time and it will make a
23 significant impact in that neighborhood. It should
24 be a model for what happens in every neighborhood and
25 I'll just add that not only is it raining on our

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2 libraries but in some cases, unfortunately it's
3 raining in our libraries and that is why it is
4 absolutely necessary that we get additional capital
5 funding so that we can do the preventive work that
6 needs to be done so that we don't find ourselves in
7 emergency situations.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you and next we'll turn
9 to Council Member Brewer.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much, I
12 agree with Charles Barron about the need for
13 libraries. He and I have been fighting for libraries
14 since 2002 and I completely agree with him. There's
15 two questions, on the capital side, I always complain
16 to DBC that they charge too much and I could never
17 understand why the libraries can't do their own
18 capital. So, and I know it's a fight and they say
19 no, no, no. They have to do it. Maybe you can,
20 maybe you can't but what would be the difference in
21 generally in capital? What you would spend versus
22 what they spend on the capital and I guess they feel
23 that you know you can't handle the building
24 [INAUDIBLE 1:32:28] and I never understand why you
25

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2 can't handle it yourself. I understanding handling
3 it with their eyes closed.

4 So, what is the difference in spending on this
5 topic of why do we have to have EDC involved. Yes,
6 they can do other things but they shouldn't be do
7 doing the libraries in my opinion.

8 TONY MARX: So, I couldn't agree more. I'm going
9 to let Iris answer but as we've said to the Council,
10 I think for every year I've been on this, the
11 averages are clear. When we manage our own projects
12 compared to when DDC manages those projects, we can
13 get them done at half the time and have the cost.
14 And that is clear savings for the citizens of New
15 York and the fact, I'll just be honest, that we have
16 not yet found a systemic solution to that is a
17 serious you know issue for all of us. It's just you
18 know this is craziness. Let me just say, the
19 administration understands this problem. They are
20 veterans of this problem. They are frustrated by
21 this problem and we are having conversations on a
22 system level you know, meaning for the systems as a
23 whole to you know think about alternatives, whether
24 it's our own authority, working with the School
25 Construction Authority, whether it's working EDC,

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2 finding alternatives so that the citizens of New York
3 get the bang for their buck that not only they
4 deserve but it's imminently doable. Iris, did I get
5 that right?

6 IRIS WEINSHALL: Yes, you did and uhm, and let me
7 just echo what Tony said. You know we're very
8 fortunate at City Hall that we have people who have
9 worked at DDC who have led DDC and they understand
10 what the problems are. I just want to say that you
11 know, a lot of the capital money over the last five
12 years that you have seen all three systems receive
13 from the City of New York is to make up for
14 shortfalls on DDC projects.

15 So, think about that. We're not being able to
16 start new projects but we're replenishing projects
17 that have already been funded but because of delays
18 and because of increasing costs and because of a
19 multitude of other problems, the projects lag, the
20 prices go up and therefore the city has to replenish
21 the cost.

22 I also want to say that I am not a lawyer and you
23 know, I was in city government when they created DDC
24 and I think Gale you were in government as well. And
25 DDC would do projects faster and cheaper. Well, now,

2 they do projects that take longer and take more
3 money. I think that what needs to be done is I think
4 we need to look at the DDC legislation. We need to
5 look at what can be carved out now and what could be
6 given over to other agencies to do work for entities
7 like cultural and like libraries.

8 As an example, NYPL has in the past few years, we
9 have used EDC to do some of our projects, as well as
10 you know, you're very familiar with this Gale, all of
11 us use passthroughs. And the big challenge there is,
12 you know it's great we get to do our own work. We
13 find pass throughs go faster. We're not as
14 incumbered with all the rules and regulations of DDC
15 but then there's the rug because you got to wait to
16 get paid back from the city and you're back in the
17 world of DDC and OMB to get your money back.

18 Look, I just want to say that uhm, uh, I know Tom
19 Foley for over 20-years and you know he's the new
20 Commissioner and I know he's trying but sometimes
21 when the guts of what you have to deal with is
22 decade, you're really fighting a losing battle here.
23 I think Linda wanted to chime in on something.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Go ahead Linda, thank you
25 all for your amazing -

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2 LINDA JOHNSON: No, I just really am nodding
3 because I couldn't agree more with Iris.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 LINDA JOHNSON: So, thank you. Well said.

6 TONY MARX: Okay and I'll just reiterate look, I
7 think the simple fact is we all, all of us, the City
8 Council, us, the Administration, the Veterans there
9 from DDC etc., understand the system is broken. It's
10 certainly broken for us. I think it's not just for
11 us and it's in all of our interest to find a solution
12 and the great news is, I think we're all focused on
13 that. We have the expertise in City Hall that
14 understand exactly what these issues are and are
15 committed to finding a solution so that we can all
16 get it done.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Look, I appreciate that.
18 I will work on it also. I had a quick question if I
19 may, is of course I am for seven days a week all the
20 libraries being at the same time. I know this is
21 crazy but can you give me a real number? I know your
22 time to figure out between [INAUDIBLE 1:37:42] on the
23 Mayor's Office versus the City Council. Much more is
24 needed but what would be the number? I ask this
25 every year. I'm not going to give up, if we were

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2 open all three branches, seven days a week, I don't
3 know, ten to ten or whatever. Whatever Harvey Robins
4 whom Iris and I know, says the library - you
5 shouldn't have to know what time the libraries open.
6 All libraries should be open all the time, whatever
7 all the time is. So, you don't have to say oh
8 goodness, I'm going to go with my son to the - is it
9 open today? No, that should not be. And so, I'm
10 just wondering what that number might look like.
11 That's the Harvey Robins theory and I subscribe to
12 it.

13 TONY MARX: So, Gale, I'm sorry, Councilwoman
14 Brewer.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Gale, I prefer Gale, you
16 know that.

17 TONY MARX: Look, last time we did this analysis
18 in 2016, so back a bit. To get the entire system,
19 all of our facilities to seven days was a marginal
20 increase of our budget, just our budget of \$28
21 million.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, that's what I want
23 to know.

24 TONY MARX: And there was rule changes that were
25 necessary alongside of that. Let me just say at this

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2 point, we are working very hard to maintain our six
3 day service with seven day service in select
4 branches.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know. That's not the
6 Harvey Robins idea though.

7 TONY MARX: I got it.

8 IRIS WEINSHALL: Well, let me just say the rule
9 change that Tony is talking about is that we would
10 have to negotiate with the unions that you know;
11 you're nodding your head Gale, that you know, you
12 wouldn't - this wouldn't be like a special work
13 condition. You know, people would be allowed to work
14 seven days a week or you know five days which is you
15 know, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and
16 Sunday, right. That would be their regular work week
17 and therefore they would not be paid overtime for
18 that. You know, some people like to work on the
19 weekends. Some people like to be off during the week
20 but right now, the rule doesn't allow us to do that.

21 NICK BURON: Council Member Gale, I love your
22 idea. As a librarian, I would love all of our
23 libraries all over the city to be open seven days a
24 week. At the moment, it's even more than a money
25 situation. We actually, we could work up to that if

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2 we had the money in phases but you know right now, we
3 just don't have the number of people to even do the
4 services that we want to do now. It would take a
5 couple years hopefully if we really wanted to set it
6 as a city goal but I love the idea, thank you.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Linda, do you know how
8 much it would be in Brooklyn?

9 LINDA JOHNSON: I think the number for Brooklyn
10 would be about \$20 million to get to the full
11 compliment that you're talking about and it's
12 something that we aspire to because I completely
13 agree and I'm already working on the possibility of
14 staying open really late on certain nights. There's
15 a program that we're trying to develop to do that on
16 Friday nights right now and it ducktails with this
17 initiative to be there for teenagers when teenagers
18 want to be coming to us.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, thank you. I
20 know one woman in Queens was open 24 hours a day. I
21 love her. Thank you very much.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next, we'll turn
23 to Council Member Dinowitz followed by Council Member
24 Hudson.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you. Hello,
3 President Marx. Brooklyn and Queens, I think you get
4 a little break. I'm really interested in the NYPL
5 this time. First, I, I, my first question is about
6 accessibility. Looking at your website, I love the
7 interactive map on the website, so we can see which
8 branches are fully, partially, or not accessible.
9 I'm pleased to say that according to the map, none
10 are not accessible but according to this map, five
11 are partially accessible and no surprise they're all
12 in the Bronx. So, my first question is, what steps
13 are being taken to ensure that all of our branches
14 are fully accessible and you specifically mentioned
15 Spuyten Duyvil, which is in my district. That's one
16 of those branches that not ADA, fully ADA accessible.

17 So, what is the specific timeline for that as
18 well as the other ones in the Bronx?

19 TONY MARX: Uh, so I know that we are committed
20 of course to everything being accessible. There are
21 obvious constraints in terms of landmarking. I know
22 that sometimes gets in the way but we have to do
23 everything we can. Iris, do you want to – the
24 Spiuten Duyvil, I don't have the specifics on that, I
25 confess.

2 IRIS WEINSHALL: So, uhm, let me just say that
3 Tony's right. It's our challenge to get all of our
4 branches totally accessible. Sometimes we uhm, what
5 happens is that we have on the books a project to do
6 a lot more work in the branch than just doing an
7 accessible project. And so, you know, I don't want
8 to keep on invoking DDC but if it gets caught up in
9 the DDC world, the ADA project you know can't be just
10 carved out and done on its own.

11 Although, you know we have identified a couple of
12 branches which I'm sorry to say Councilman are not in
13 your district, that you know we have just started ADA
14 projects. Let me just say and I'm not patting
15 ourselves on the back, that when I started at the
16 library, we had many more projects, many more
17 libraries that were not ADA compliant and you know
18 that we're down to a handful now and so, you know we
19 are working very hard to make sure that at least most
20 of these will be partially accessible.

21 You know, the five Carnegies that we selected to
22 do a top to bottom renovation, a couple of them were
23 glaring in terms of their non-accessibility. You
24 know, in one instance, at Melrose in the Bronx, but
25 that's not your district I don't think. There was a

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2 large set of stairs that you had to walk up to get
3 just to the information desk. And you know, there
4 was no partial elevator. There was no ramp. I mean,
5 it was outrageous but now, that branch will be
6 totally renovated, totally accessible.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: You're allowed to be
8 proud of yourself and allowed to pat yourself on the
9 back if that's the work you've done. You know but
10 specially Sputen Duyvil, it is one of the one's that
11 was mentioned in your testimony and which is why I'm
12 asking. I assume fully ADA compliance is part of the
13 renovation and there is other renovation that's being
14 done at that branch. Is there a timeline for that
15 renovation?

16 IRIS WEINSHALL: We will get back to you. Just
17 off the top of my head, I don't know that the
18 timeline is for Spuyten Duyvil.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: If you can also get
20 back to - I'm sorry, if you could also get back to me
21 on if there is a timeline for the branches that
22 weren't mentioned in the testimony but are still
23 labeled as partially accessible if there is a
24 timeline for making those fully compliant, even if
25 there's not a top to bottom renovation?

2 TONY MARX: We will get that to you. We are
3 committed to every renovation producing maximum
4 accessibility, complete accessibility. And I just
5 want to reiterate going back to the point, using
6 Iris's example, when we get funding that we are not
7 encumbered with DDC, we can use it effectively to do
8 planned work, the ten year capital plan money, the
9 five Carnegies. Then we can do all of this rather
10 than higgledy-piggledy and paying twice as much.
11 That's further evidence of you know we - let me be
12 blunt. We have Iris, Brooklyn and Queens has proven
13 that we can do this work. It is now time for our
14 partners in city government to prove that you can
15 help us rethink this system so that we can do that
16 work and get it done for you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah, ensuring our
18 branches are accessible to everyone as a shared
19 valuable we both have, I want to make sure that it
20 happens. I'd love to see that timeline and just you
21 know -

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: You know one thing
24 about the programming - Chair, if I may have another
25 minute to ask this question?

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2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Sure, go ahead.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you Chair. So, I
4 really love how much you're talking about the work
5 you do with youth and with teens. You know that was
6 my youth. That was the experience of so many of my
7 students when I was a teacher.

8 I had asked a similar question last time and I'm
9 still you know trying to make sense of it and see how
10 that programming can be better and more intertwined
11 with other city agencies. So, is the work with the
12 DOE systemic? So, I'd asked about the - it sounds
13 like, I think it was Iris who said it. I may be
14 wrong, that there are principals who collaborate with
15 branches and with libraries but is that a directive
16 from the DOE? Is it a DOE tap down directive and in
17 the same vane is the capacity to collaborate, not
18 just in the schools but with community centers, even
19 hospitals and community events. Even with me, you
20 know we do movie nights and we do community events.
21 Is that based on the individual branch or is that
22 based on central capacity for the NYPL?

23 TONY MARX: I mean we are, so, Mr. Councilman, we
24 work in partnership with DOE. We work in partnership
25 with other city agencies. With nonprofits, with you

2 know vendors, all kinds of folks. Those partnerships
3 are essential for us. I think they are recognized as
4 systemic though they often come down to – it often
5 comes down to you know case by case, making it work.

6 The most obvious example of this is the My
7 Libraries NYC program, which is across the five
8 boroughs. Simply put when you know ten years ago,
9 you know the city was saying like Chancellor was
10 saying we can't manage to pay to have libraries in
11 our schools which is unthinkable. And you know, we
12 said well, we got 55 million items, sitting mostly
13 you know waiting for somebody to use them.

14 So, now in more than half the schools, we are in
15 fact circulating library, bringing books into the
16 branches for kids to use. No fines, no problem.
17 That's systemic and its an example but it's also an
18 example of the ongoing work and discussions. What
19 about the other half of the schools? And what else
20 can we do like the curriculum work with the Center
21 for Educators and Students. I'll just say that I
22 chatted with the Chancellor again just the other day
23 and we're going to sit down and once again say, okay,
24 what other systemic efforts are there that can really
25 be game changers here to bring us together.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Great and that's the
3 key. I think it's very hard to rely on your - uh,
4 like I said, an individual teacher, an individual
5 principal or even librarian to just know what to do.
6 So, I do think those conversations and that
7 collaboration is a vital part of getting the teen
8 program that you're doing so well. To really making
9 that as successful as possible. And I'll just add, I
10 know you're excited about the digital stuff but I
11 really do miss my card catalogue, I got to say.

12 TONY MARX: I got one right here.

13 IRIS WEINSHALL: Councilman, can I just make one
14 other point? You talk about ADA and I just want to
15 make one point.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Sure.

17 IRIS WEINSHALL: So, we talk about the physical
18 impairment that people have to physically get in the
19 library. What we have incorporated in all of our new
20 libraries, is the ability for people who are hearing
21 impaired and wearing hearing aids, so when they come
22 into the library, they hook into our system and
23 therefore they are able to hear more clearly and
24 better in the library. And we've built that in all
25 new libraries that we've constructed.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I really love that you
3 brought that up, you know not all disabilities are
4 visible. Although the icon - one would think the
5 icon for fully accessible is a stick figure in a
6 wheelchair, so that's very often the image we get but
7 I really value that you shared that and that that's
8 part of your accessibility. Thank you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member and
10 Council Member Hudson, your hand was up but it's
11 down. Did you have any questions?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: I did just have one
13 question and hello, good morning. Thank you all for
14 being here and for your testimonies. I was just
15 wondering and I know I think someone say earlier that
16 the focus was really on youth. But I was just
17 curious to know if you have any numbers in terms of
18 seniors or older adults that are accessing your
19 systems? What percentage of your visitors or what
20 percentage of youths is by seniors or older adults
21 and also, if there's any specific funding for seniors
22 in the library system? That would be helpful to
23 know. Thank you.

24 LINDA JOHNSON: I'll jump in first. Thank you
25 Councilwoman Hudson. I thought as the testimony was

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2 unfolding this morning that no one has talked about
3 the work we do with older adults and it's quite
4 substantial. We have all kinds of programs that are
5 particularly designed to focus on this portion of our
6 audience. For starters, during the pandemic, I just
7 want to mention again, how terrific our libraries
8 were to be calling on the patrons that they have
9 personal relationships with. This is at a very
10 microlevel but we know who is shut in. Who we've
11 been delivering books to before the pandemic and so,
12 we're particularly concerned about them.

13 In terms of numbers, I don't have specific
14 numbers with me. I can talk about uhm, the fact that
15 we had 27,000 older adults coming to 1,200 virtual
16 sessions. But the scope of the programs that we
17 offer is quite extensive, including a debate league
18 for older adults, which is designed not only to get
19 adults talking about civic issues but also to create
20 a network of people for them to interact with and to
21 connect with in their neighborhoods.

22 TONY MARX: Councilwoman, can I just add that you
23 know the seniors as Linda said, you know those
24 programs are essential for us and obviously that's
25 some indication. We can get you more details on

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2 that. The other thing just to say, just to be clear
3 is, you know we sort of have a disadvantage, that we
4 disadvantage ourselves on purpose in this particular
5 way. We're the last people, last institution that
6 believes in privacy. We don't believe in
7 surveillance. We, so in a sense, some of the fine
8 grained sort of analysis we might be able to give
9 you, we can't give you because we choose not to sort
10 of make people feel surveilled or force them to sign
11 up for things that they don't want to put their name
12 on etc..

13 So, there's a bit of that based on principle to
14 be honest.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Yeah, and understood and
16 I appreciate that certainly, so.

17 TONY MARX: The only one's left to appreciate
18 that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Yeah, I hear that.

20 NICK BURON: I will say the you know, moving to a
21 virtual environment really did give us an
22 opportunity. I think a lot of people think that the
23 young people are all into the tech and the older
24 people are not. That is absolutely not the case. A
25 lot of older people who otherwise were not able to

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2 attend in person programming were very much able to
3 attend virtual programming. So, that for us was you
4 know something that was wonderful to see. Of course
5 we do mail book you know to homebound you know adults
6 in general and even children as well, so it's not
7 just older. But you know the large print books for
8 those that are having more difficulty reading,
9 recreational clubs. You know, clubs like creative
10 aging, art programs that are really starting to come
11 back now more in person as well. So, we need to
12 continue that virtual programming, that in-person
13 programming.

14 And I would just say even on a small level and
15 this gets to the dedication of our staff, Linda had
16 really spoken very well about staff making phone
17 calls. You know we have staff making phone calls on
18 New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, when it's really
19 difficult to be alone. And so, that's small, it
20 doesn't affect many people but that is so, you know
21 so emblematic of what our staff does and how much
22 they care about the populations they serve.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member
25 Hudson. Chairs, that is all for questioning for the

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2 library collection, so I will turn it back to you two
3 for closing remarks.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Councilman Ossé.

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yeah, definitely. I want to
6 just reiterate Council Member Barron's sentiments. I
7 mean, we've heard all of the questions throughout
8 these past couple of hours in terms of what our
9 libraries are doing and clearly, they're going above
10 and beyond. You know our budget needs to reflect the
11 same in terms of uplifting and supporting every
12 single program and service that they're providing to
13 our city. You know they are here year round, have
14 been with us throughout this pandemic, thus they need
15 the support, the fiscal support from our taxpayer
16 dollars.

17 So, I thank all of you Tony, Linda, Nick. Thank
18 you for being here. Thank you for being fierce
19 fighters. Thank you for being fierce New Yorkers.
20 Now it's up to us, the government, to do right by you
21 and to do right by the people that attend these
22 libraries and that's thousands, hundreds of thousands
23 of our New Yorkers.

24 IRIS WEINSHALL: Thank you.

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I echo Chairman Ossé and I
3 still remember my days at the public library getting
4 my RIF card, Reading is Fundamental. I remember
5 those days fondly and I always have a soft spot for
6 the libraries. So, when the library advocates come
7 knocking on our door, I usually tell them they are
8 preaching to the choir, so we'll do everything that
9 we can on our side to get you what you need to
10 continue the great work that you do. Tony, Nick,
11 Linda, Iris, everyone on the call, and I saw one of
12 my favorite constituents Karen Sheehan as well.

13 So, thank you guys so much and with that, we will
14 move onto our next agency. Thank you guys.

15 TONY MARX: Thank you.

16 LINDA JOHNSON: Thank you. Love the picture of
17 James Baldwin.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Right on, he keeps me
19 going.

20 TONY MARX: I was going to say Chair Brannan, if
21 you want, you know we acquired Jimmy's papers. His
22 archives are now -

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Oh wow, yeah, now you're
24 talking.

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2 TONY MARX: We'll arrange for you to see him.

3 It's fixed up.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: You know the way to my
5 heart. Thank you Tony. Thank you.

6 TONY MARX: Thank you all.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright, Chairs, bear with us
8 one moment. Uhm, we're going to sound check DCLA,
9 whose been very patiently waiting. We're behind
10 schedule by 29 minutes, so we need to pick up our
11 pace. So, I will leave it to Sergeant Biondo to do a
12 mic check for everyone.

13 SERGEANT BIONDO: Commissioner Cumbo, you should
14 be able to unmute yourself for an audio test.

15 LAURIE CUMBO: Good morning.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Really, do we trust
17 Commissioner Cumbo? I mean, I don't know if it's a
18 great idea.

19 SERGEANT BIONDO: And next up BCA LA Director of
20 Finance Shao, if you want to unmute yourself for an
21 audio test.

22 PHILLIPPA SHAO: Hi.

23 SERGEANT BIONDO: Hi, welcome.

24 PHILLIPPA SHAO: Thank you.

25

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2 SERGEANT BIONDO: Alright, that seems to be the
3 only two members if I'm not mistaking. If so,
4 Malcom, we are ready to go.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're actually waiting for
6 Deputy Commissioner Feinberg and Shirley Levy, Chief
7 of Staff.

8 SHEELAH FEINBERG: We're here. Here we are.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ah okay, alright. So, we're
10 going to get started everyone. This is Department of
11 Cultural Affairs. Present is Brannan, Ossé, Powers,
12 Ayala, Velázquez, Ung, Sanchez, Louis, Kagan, Joseph,
13 Farias, Dinowitz, Brewer and Barron. We'll turn
14 first to Chair Brannan, then Chair Ossé, then I'll
15 swear in DCLA.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you Malcom. We are
17 now going to begin the second portion of today's
18 hearing, day six of Executive Budget hearings and
19 we're joined by a familiar face from Vogue magazine.
20 I want to extend a warm welcome and congratulations
21 to the recently engaged Laurie Cumbo, our former
22 Council colleague and now Commissioner of the
23 Department of Cultural Affairs. Welcome Laurie.
24 Again, a big congrats to you. It's great to see you.

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2 I'm still joined by Council Member, Co-Chair for
3 this hearing, Chi Ossé, Chair of the Committee on
4 Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
5 Intergroup Relations. The Department of Cultural
6 Affairs projected FY23 budget of \$155 million,
7 represents less than one percent of the city's
8 proposed Fiscal '23 budget in the Executive Plan.

9 DCLA's FY23 budget increased by \$6.6 percent from
10 the preliminary plan. The increase is the result of
11 a number of actions taken. Most significant of which
12 are \$5.2 million for cultural organizations as
13 outlined in the Mayor's blueprint for New York City's
14 economic recovery and \$4 million for an adjustment of
15 the heat, light and power energy subsidy that we've
16 seen basically across the board in all the agencies.

17 Like the library systems, our wide and unique and
18 very cultural legacy has changed the lives for many
19 for generations. It's what New York City is all
20 about. For traditionally underserved communities,
21 museums, theaters, art exhibits and so much more,
22 greatly matter to those communities and promote the
23 exchange of ideas, community harmony and so many
24 other positive benefits of this city. COVID has
25 shown a light on how critical these service are to

2 our city's residents and their recovery from the
3 pandemic.

4 I'm going to focus my questions today on the
5 cultural community additional need in the Mayor's
6 Blueprint for economic recovery. Special thanks
7 again to Aliya Ali for her preparation and hard work
8 behind the scenes for today's hearing. Of course, to
9 all the Finance Staff who helps make these hearings
10 possible. I'm now going to turn it to my Chair, Co-
11 Chair Council Member Ossé.

12 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you Chair Brannan. I
13 don't know how you have been doing this all week.
14 This is a rough job but you're killing it. Good
15 morning and welcome to this hearing for the Committee
16 on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
17 Intergroup Relations. Again, I am Council Member Chi
18 Ossé, Chair of this Committee.

19 First, I would like to welcome Commissioner Cumbo
20 to her first Budget Hearing as a Commissioner. As
21 Chair of this Committee, I look forward to working in
22 partnership with you and DCLA to ensure that our
23 cultural community is supported and we bring equity
24 and inclusion into this work.

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2 This afternoon, we will be discussing the Fiscal
3 2023 Executive Expense Budget for DCLA which stands
4 at \$155 million in the Fiscal 2023 Executive Capital
5 Plan, which includes \$975.6 million in Fiscal 2022 to
6 2026 for the department.

7 The Fiscal 2023 Preliminary Plan did not
8 adequately fund the city's cultural organizations as
9 they recover from the economic impacts of the COVID-
10 19 pandemic. Which was devastating to our culturals,
11 especially cultural organizations and artists of
12 color.

13 When the world thinks of New York City, they
14 think of the arts, history, music, and culture. Our
15 cultural institutions, organizations and artists
16 contribute to our urban jungle. The cultural
17 community is not only an economic driver for our city
18 but it is also the foundation for much of what makes
19 New York City vibrant, healthy and alive. And
20 despite the hardships faced during the pandemic, our
21 cultural community stepped up for our city.

22 Operating as vaccination hubs, polling sites during
23 presidential elections, advocated for social justice
24 during the 2020 Black Lives Matter and stop Asian
25 hate movements and served as a beacon of hope and

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2 unity for our city during a time of uncertainty and
3 isolation.

4 A 2017 U-PINN study found that even when
5 controlling for race and economic status, cultural
6 activity accounted for a 14 percent decrease in cases
7 of child abuse and neglect and 18 percent increase in
8 kids scoring on the top stratum on English and Math
9 exams and 18 percent decrease in the serious crime
10 rate and significant improvements to physical well-
11 being.

12 Other studies mirrored these results while
13 demonstrating marked improvements to neighborhood
14 mental health. As our country's youth base, a
15 shocking mental health crisis. The programming,
16 resources, and safe spaces afforded by our cultural
17 institutions are among our most powerful tools to
18 combat it.

19 Fully funding our cultural programs will protect and
20 create thousands of jobs. It will stabilize families
21 and it will grow our tax base. Funding increases
22 will pay for themselves, in addition to the countless
23 benefits their programs bring to our city.

24 As we commit ourselves to supporting our
25 cultural programs, I'd like to remember the proper framing.

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2 New York City's creative sector accounted for 13
3 percent of our economic output before COVID. While
4 it received only one percent of our city funding.
5 For that disparity, we all lose and it's to all our
6 sakes that we work to shrink it.

7 After seeing how inadequate the Preliminary
8 Budget was, I as Chair of this Committee, reached out
9 to our cultural community to see how our city can
10 support them as they navigate through COVID. Our
11 culturals are advocating for an additional \$100
12 million to the DCLA budget to sufficiently support
13 our cultural institution group, otherwise known as
14 the CIG's, increased grants for the Cultural
15 Development Fund, CDF and ensure that our cultural
16 organizations and artists, especially organizations
17 and artists of color are financially supported as our
18 city navigates through the pandemic.

19 And this \$100 million proposal was something I am
20 championing as Chair of this Committee. Despite all
21 they have done for our city when we need it the most,
22 our cultural institutions have been failed by the
23 administration. Aside from slight increases for the
24 Mayor's Economic Recovery Blueprint for culturals,
25 which I will ask for more clarification on at this

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2 hearing, funds for the SoHo/NoHo Neighborhood Plan
3 and heat, light and power subsidies, there is no
4 additional funding to DCLA and our culturals in this
5 Executive Budget.

6 As Chair, I'm not only disappointed, but I'm
7 frustrated and upset at the Administrations failure
8 to properly fund and support our cultural community.
9 It is the Council's responsibility to ensure that the
10 city's budget is fair, transparent and accountable to
11 New Yorkers. Hence, as the Chair of the Committee on
12 Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
13 Intergroup Relations, I will continue to push for
14 accountability and accuracy and ensure that the
15 budget reflects the needs and interest of the city.

16 It is essential that the budget that we adopt
17 this year is transparent and accountable and
18 reflective of the priorities and interest of the
19 Council and the people we represent. This hearing is
20 a vital part of this process and I expect that DCLA
21 will be responsive to the questions and concerns of
22 Council Members. I look forward to an active
23 engagement with the Administration over the next few
24 months to ensure that the Fiscal 2023 Adopted Budget
25 meets the goals the Council has set out and fully and

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2 equitably meets the needs of our cultural community,
3 especially as we recover from the pandemic.

4 I would like to thank my staff for organizing
5 today's hearing, including my Chief of Staff Naomi
6 Hopkins, my Policy and Budget Director Maybutrabon
7 Battana and from central staff Committee's Counsel's
8 Brenda McKinney, Legislative Policy Analyst Cristy
9 Dwyer and Unit Head Aliya Ali. Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chairs Brannan and
11 Ossé. Just reminding everyone, members of the
12 Administration, you'll be able to mute and unmute
13 yourselves. We just ask that when not speaking, to
14 please mute yourself.

15 Council Members present, you know what I'm going
16 to say, you have five minutes for questions, please
17 stick to the timer. Use the raise hand function and
18 I'll call you in order. The following members of the
19 Administration are here to testify and/or answer
20 questions. We're very happy to see Laurie Cumbo,
21 Commissioner of DCLA, Sheelah Feinberg, Deputy
22 Commissioner, Shirly Levy, Chief of Staff, and
23 Phillippa Shao, Director of Finance.

24 I will first read the oath and after, I will call
25 on each of you individually to respond. Do you

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2 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing
3 but the truth before these Committee's and to respond
4 honestly to Council Member questions? Commissioner
5 Cumbo?

6 LAURIE CUMBO: I do.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Deputy Commissioner Feinberg?

8 SHEELAH FEINBERG: I do.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chief of Staff Levy?

10 SHIRLEY LEVY: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And Director of Finance Shao?

12 PHILLIPPA SHAO: I do.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Commissioner
14 Cumbo, whenever you're ready.

15 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you. Good morning, Chairs
16 Brannan and Ossé and members of the committees. I am
17 Laurie Cumbo, Commissioner of the New York City
18 Department of Cultural Affairs. I am here today to
19 testify in regards to the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2023
20 Executive Budget for DCLA. This will be my first
21 time on this side of a Council hearing. And so I'm
22 excited for today's conversation. I am particularly
23 excited to see that this is the most diverse City
24 Council that we've had in New York City's history and
25 I'm so proud to see particularly so many women

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2 through the 21 and 21 Initiative was so successful.

3 A number of my staff from the Department are joining
4 me today, including Deputy Commissioner Sheelah
5 Feinberg, Chief of Staff Shirley Levy, and Finance
6 Director Phillippa Shao.

7 I've had the pleasure of meeting a number of you
8 in person and seeing you at cultural events all
9 across this city. Chair Ossé and I were throwing
10 pink and blue powder at each other at the Brooklyn
11 Children's Museum for the Holi celebration a few
12 weeks ago. I was happy to see Council Member Hudson
13 at the Brooklyn Museum for their great celebration
14 and I'm always so excited to see Chair Farah Louis at
15 so many of her Juneteenth celebrations that happen
16 every year and I'm so excited to see what she will
17 produce this year.

18 I previously served in the City Council for eight
19 years, representing the 35th District in Brooklyn.
20 During my tenure, I was a proud champion of the arts.
21 I helped spearhead the effort to save Weeksville
22 Heritage Center by adding it to the Cultural
23 Institutions Group. I passed legislation that
24 created the Mayor's Office to Prevent Gun Violence,
25 and also invested in arts groups to reduce gun

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2 violence through the Art as a Catalyst for Change
3 initiative.

4 I fought to expand the Coalition of Theatres of
5 Color initiative from just \$700,000 for eight
6 theaters, to over \$3.7 million for more than 50
7 theaters encompassing a wide range of communities of
8 color. And I'd like to add that Council Member
9 Barron as well as Councilwoman Barron were
10 instrumental in the creation of the Theaters of Color
11 along with the late great Ruby Dee and Ozie Davis.
12 It's a phenomenal program that's helped so many
13 organizations and now there are organizations such as
14 Thalia Spanish Theater, Chinese Theater Works, and
15 Amerinda.

16 And I fought for DCLA to cover energy costs for
17 organizations on DCLA property. I also passed
18 legislation that will expand the City Canvas pilot,
19 transforming construction sheds around the city into
20 platforms for community-driven art and expression.
21 Before joining the Council, I was the founding
22 director of the Museum of Contemporary African
23 Diasporan Arts in Fort Greene, and worked at various
24 cultural institutions around the city before that.
25 While leading MoCADA, I also helped to establish the

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2 Cultural Equity Group, a citywide coalition that
3 fought for more equitable funding for organizations
4 of color. I am thrilled and humbled to be starting
5 this next chapter of my career as Commissioner and
6 look forward to working with each and every one of
7 you. The Chair and members of this committee, to
8 help uplift cultural groups in every single corner of
9 New York City.

10 Now, turning to today's Budget hearing. Let's
11 take a look at the budget numbers. The Mayor's
12 Fiscal Year '23 Executive Budget allocates \$154.7
13 million in city funds to DCLA. This includes \$33.5
14 million for the Cultural Development Fund, an
15 increase of \$5.2 million from the preliminary budget,
16 which I'll say more about in a moment; \$111.1 million
17 for the Cultural Institutions Group; \$1.25 million
18 for energy grants to groups on DCLA-owned property;
19 \$6.7 million for agency operations; and just over \$2
20 million for the other agency programs and
21 initiatives.

22 As is typical for the Mayor's Executive Budget,
23 this figure does not include any one-time additions
24 that tend to be added at budget adoption such as
25

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2 Mayoral adds or the Council's member items and
3 initiatives.

4 By comparison, DCLA's executive budget for Fiscal
5 Year '22 at this same point in the process was \$144.9
6 million. So not only is our funding higher, but I'm
7 pleased and I know my team is very pleased to report
8 that the executive budget includes an addition of six
9 full time positions for the agency, bringing us to a
10 total of 55. This is game changing for this agency.
11 Many of you have called in terms of projects that
12 have been stalled, that have been put on hold and
13 this is going to give us the power and the energy to
14 bring those projects to fruition more efficiently and
15 effectively than ever before.

16 These new and restored staff lines will help us
17 move everything from procurement to capital equipment
18 projects forward, which are critical for smaller not-
19 for-profits. We can't wait to fill these positions
20 and start delivering even more great services for our
21 cultural nonprofits, so if you have individuals in
22 your community who you would like to apply for these
23 positions, please send their resumes over.

24 This Administration is committed to supporting
25 our Cultural community and understands the vital role

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2 this community plays in New York City's recovery. We
3 see this commitment in the Executive budget and
4 DCLA's important place in the Blueprint Economic
5 Recovery.

6 We are looking forward to continuing work with
7 you at Council and our partners at City Hall and OMB
8 to find best ways to provide robust support to our
9 Cultural Community as we continue in this process.

10 While Fiscal Year '23 capital funding won't be
11 allocated until adoption, DCLA's amazing capital
12 portfolio includes \$976 million for hundreds of
13 cultural projects around the city. These range from
14 a new education center for the Louis Armstrong House
15 Museum in Queens, improvements to the Children's
16 Adventure Garden at the New York Botanic Garden in
17 the Bronx, and renovations of the historic houses at
18 Weeksville Heritage Center in Brooklyn. No other
19 city in America matches our commitment to supporting
20 cultural groups' capital needs. This is critical
21 support. It makes us a partner in ensuring
22 accessible, sustainable, extraordinary cultural
23 infrastructure that serves all New Yorkers.

24 We look forward to continuing to make these
25 unique, targeted investment alongside the Mayor's

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2 Office, Council, and Borough Presidents. That's
3 where we stand in the executive budget. I'm happy to
4 answer any questions you have about the budget during
5 Q&A. But first, I'd like to provide a few updates
6 from DCLA and the wider cultural community.

7 Several members of this committee and their
8 staffs joined us for a briefing on the agency last
9 week and we couldn't be happier that so many of you
10 participated. We focused on how we collaborate with
11 the City Council in supporting cultural groups. I
12 appreciate the time you all took for this briefing.
13 We know it was a lot of information but I also want
14 to add, we are so open and ready to do this
15 presentation for the entire City Council. It's a
16 great way to kick off our work together and it should
17 give you a context for the programs and initiatives
18 I'm about to talk a little bit about.

19 The Cultural Development Fund: My team in the
20 DCLA Programs Unit is hard at work on the upcoming
21 Cultural Development Fund application review process.
22 After launching the application last month, we're
23 preparing to review what we anticipate will be the
24 largest round of applications ever. More than 1,200
25 from nonprofits across the city. That's why the

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2 agencies headcount increased and it's so critical to
3 us at this time. A couple of important points about
4 this year's CDF: For one, this is the first time
5 we're bringing groups back for competitive panel
6 reviews since the start of the pandemic,

7 Two, this year will include a number of exciting
8 reforms to make the process fairer, simpler, and more
9 equitable. And there are two calls to action for our
10 cultural community right now. This was so important
11 to me when I came in as Commissioner. We need to
12 make panelists at the forefront of this entire
13 process. We are asking for panelists and every one
14 of you can help us to do that. Please recommend
15 panelists that that you know are from art community,
16 that have the expertise and the energy and the
17 excitement to understand how this process works so
18 that we can bring those resources back to our
19 communities. We're looking for people who represent
20 the full help and the full breadth of New York City's
21 diversity to bring their perspectives and expertise
22 to the review process, learn more how to become a
23 panelist at on.nyc.gov/CDFpanels.

24 And second, applications are due Monday, May 16.
25 I can't express that enough. That's three days from

2 now. Go to our website, we've got recorded webinars,
3 we've got an FAQ, we've got everything you need to
4 apply. As the founder of a not-for-profit arts
5 organization. I know firsthand how much that DCLA
6 grant means. It opens up the doors to cooperate and
7 foundation support, as well as to individuals and
8 that is so critical. So, please, consider applying
9 this year. Visit nyc.gov/culture for more. This
10 year's CDF will include a \$5 million boost, provided
11 as part of Mayor Adams' economic recovery blueprint.
12 This will deliver much-needed funding to groups
13 across the city as they continue to recover from the
14 pandemic, and bring their communities with them.

15 The blueprint also includes funding for a pilot
16 program that will help smaller groups navigate the
17 process of undertaking major capital projects. The
18 goal is to make sure these organizations can benefit
19 from this important source of support, and in turn
20 help them serve as anchors for recovery in
21 communities across the city.

22 DCLA's Public Artists in Residence program, also
23 known as PAIR, embeds artists in city agencies to
24 tackle intractable civic problems through creative
25 practice. How exciting is that that we're able to

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2 take our artists and have them work with our city
3 agencies to bring about a greater understanding in
4 different ways of looking at our agencies through the
5 eyes of our artists.

6 One project to grow from this unique program was
7 The People's Bus, created by Yazmany Arboleda when he
8 embedded with the Civic Engagement Commission last
9 year. I was overjoyed to see Chair Ossé and several
10 other committee members earlier this month as the bus
11 rolled out into its new home at The Clemente on the
12 Lower East Side. I also recently joined artist
13 Sophia Dawson at the Brownsville Houses to unveil a
14 mural project she developed as artist-in residence
15 with the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. It was
16 so beautiful to see the eyes of all the young people
17 that participated in Brownsville in this project.

18 And one of the current PAIRs, sTo Len, recently
19 launched the Office of In Visibility at the
20 Department of Sanitation. At DSNY, Len aims to get
21 New Yorkers to consider their relationship with the
22 waste they generate and the city agency that
23 processes it for them, interrogating the notion of
24 "out of sight, out of mind." Visit
25 officeofinvisibility.com to participate in this

2 thought provoking project. Together, these PAIR
3 projects drive home the power artists have for re-
4 framing and reimagining the world around us, and the
5 awesome things we can do when city government
6 embraces their creative energy.

7 I'm excited to report that things are once again
8 happening and blossoming all over at Materials for
9 the Arts. Our one-of-a-kind creative reuse facility
10 in Long Island City fully reopened last November.
11 While the committed team at MFTA never stopped
12 serving our cultural community with free supplies,
13 their members have embraced the chance to return to
14 in person shopping. And I just want to say during
15 the pandemic, materials for the arts was so
16 instrumental in getting art supplies, notebooks,
17 pens, paper, and all of the supplies that our young
18 people needed during the pandemic. They were even
19 also so critical during the tragic fire that happened
20 in the Bronx and getting supplies to so many families
21 in need. The materials for the arts program does so
22 much for New Yorkers.

23 If you haven't already, please make sure you
24 visit the warehouse, since it is reopened, receiving
25 nearly \$3 million worth of supplies that fuel arts

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2 and education programming around the city. The Great
3 Dance Shoe Giveaway that kicked off in February has
4 so far delivered more than 10,000 pairs of dance
5 shoes to students and dancers across the city.

6 Excuse me for one moment.

7 My apologies, I think we had a little bit of
8 technical difficulty at this time. The Great Dance
9 Shoe Giveaway that kicked off in February delivered
10 10,000 pairs of dance shoes to students and dancers
11 across the city. In early June, we will host the
12 Sustainable Art Show, looking back at MFTA's
13 pioneering artist and residency program. We invite
14 the Council and everyone else to join us. Visit
15 nyc.gov/mfta and click on events for more info.

16 Last month, our partners at the Mayor's Office of
17 Immigrant Affairs and Department of Social Services
18 launched a renewal campaign for the IDNYC program.
19 As you know, IDNYC is a powerful tool that connects
20 so many New Yorkers, including our undocumented
21 neighbors with services many of us take for granted,
22 like opening a bank account. Working with over three
23 dozen organization partners, we've also made sure
24 it's a tool for expanding access to our city's
25 amazing cultural assets. From the Bronx Zoo to MoMA

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2 PS1, to Pregones, Film Forum, and many more, your
3 IDNYC card gets you free memberships to cultural
4 groups in all five boroughs. We encourage all New
5 Yorkers to get or renew their IDNYC today at
6 nyc.gov/idnyc.

7 As the weather gets warmer, another sign of hope
8 I'm thrilled to see around New York is the return of
9 our summer cultural festivals and events. Then tenth
10 annual NYC By Design Festival is happening now and
11 art fairs are being held all month long. Celebrate
12 Brooklyn is coming back to the Lena Horne Bandshell
13 in Prospect Park. Governors Island will host a
14 season full of festivals, exhibitions, and other
15 programs, and LMCC is bringing back the famous River
16 to River festival.

17 Next month, Casita Maria is putting on the South
18 Bronx Culture Festival. And around the city, the
19 Festival of New York is coordinating programming far
20 and wide. When we say that culture is going to drive
21 our city's recovery, these summer festivals that are
22 bringing communities together are the perfect
23 example.

24 As you all know from having your ear to the
25 ground in your districts, this doesn't even scratch

2 the surface of cultural activity that brings
3 neighborhoods to life and communities together in
4 every corner of our city. As New York continues to
5 reopen and recover, this Administration believes in
6 the power of art and culture to bring us together and
7 drive us forward. This deep commitment is reflected
8 in our investments in and support for the artists and
9 organizations who do this critically important work.

10 Having served on the Council myself, I know how
11 critical the partnership between the Council and this
12 agency is for investing in and supporting our
13 cultural community. I want to build on work and
14 accomplishments from recent years, which in turn
15 built on the advocacy of activists stretching back
16 generations. Collectively, we've taken major steps
17 toward making our cultural sector more open,
18 equitable, inclusive, and welcoming to all New
19 Yorkers. But there's still so much more we need to
20 accomplish. DCLA is working with the members of the
21 CIG, who typically employ thousands of New Yorkers
22 and attract millions of visitors each year to
23 implement their diversity plans. With this year's
24 CDF, we're rolling out new reforms to make the
25 application process simpler and more accessible, and

2 building greater equity into the review and awards
3 process. Internal DEI work at DCLA is ensuring that
4 these values, our facing initiatives are deeply
5 rooted in the agency's culture and values. New
6 Yorkers from all backgrounds need to understand that
7 working in the arts is a powerful form of public
8 service. In turn, we need to take steps to make sure
9 that working in the arts is something everyone sees
10 as a pathway open to them.

11 Another DCLA program I admire is the CUNY
12 Cultural Corps, which provides paid internships for
13 CUNY students at cultural groups across the city.
14 DCLA is also encouraging cultural organizations to
15 serve as host sites for the Summer Youth Employment
16 Program, giving youth and paid opportunities to work
17 in our cultural community. I had my own powerful
18 experience as a summer youth intern in the cultural
19 sector, starting at the Met Museum when I was 15, and
20 later working at the Brooklyn Children's Museum and
21 the Brooklyn Museum.

22 We need to see our summer youth and CUNY students
23 as the future cultural leaders they are, and invest
24 in their professional growth now. That means making
25 the most of existing opportunities, and fighting for

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2 more. As the budget process moves forward, I look
3 forward to working with each and every one of you,
4 realizing this shared vision for a more vibrant,
5 inclusive, and equitable cultural sector. I am happy
6 to answer any questions you have at this time. Thank
7 you so much to our Chairs and the entire Committee
8 for your time and I look forward to your questions.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you Commissioner. You
10 said a lot of great things about a lot of Council
11 Members except me, but we will - I will try to not
12 think about that as we negotiate the budget. I know
13 you have a special place in your heart for me.

14 LAURIE CUMBO: Very special.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, let's get into it.
16 Before we begin, I always preface it with the
17 Committee today, we might not get to all of our
18 questions or you might not have all the responses.
19 Certainly I don't anticipate that but we will send a
20 follow-up letter for any of the unanswered questions.

21 So, the cultural community requests that an
22 additional \$45 million in Fiscal '23 for strategic
23 initiatives, which include marketing, tourism and
24 workforce development programs. Has the agency
25

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2 looked into expansion of funding and services in
3 these areas?

4 LAURIE CUMBO: We are continuously as I have come
5 and been appointed to this position about a month and
6 a half ago, we are continuously looking at all of the
7 partnerships in ways that we can move and grow the
8 agency, pushing forward. So, the \$45 million that
9 you are discussing, we are looking at that. We are
10 looking how to best strategize to make sure that
11 funding for our agency best reflects the diversity of
12 the City of New York and that we are putting time,
13 investment and energy into those initiatives to make
14 sure that we have a more diverse and robust city that
15 is reflective of our cultural community.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And does the agency have
17 dedicated funding to support BIPOC led and serving
18 organizations?

19 LAURIE CUMBO: There are many initiatives that we
20 have throughout this particular agency. The Theaters
21 of Color initiative is one that we oversee that I
22 spoke about earlier. That provides critical funding
23 for many of our organizations of color. We also
24 have, as you are well aware, of the Cultural
25 Immigration Fund, which is a critical organization

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2 for many BIPOC organizations and much of our CASA
3 program also supports the BIPOC community
4 specifically in that way.

5 When I was in the City Council, I was pleased to
6 create the art as a catalyst for change initiative.

7 And that provides funding for many of our arts
8 organizations for doing work. In organizations most
9 impacted by gun violence. Many of those providers
10 come from our BIPOC artist community and we are
11 pleased to support them and I am confident that in
12 this years CDF process, because with your help, we
13 are going to have the most diverse panel process ever
14 and a diverse panel process is going to lead to
15 greater funding of organizations that are reflective
16 of the City of New York.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: In the Fiscal '22 adopted
18 plan there was \$12.6 million in federal funding for
19 the City Artist Corp. This program supported New
20 York City based working artists who were
21 disproportionately impacted by COVID. The funding
22 was not included in the Fiscal '23 Prelim for the
23 Executive Plan.

24 So, what is the plan going forward to continue to
25 support the city's artists?

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2 LAURIE CUMBO: I'm going to have it this time,
3 I'm going to have Shirley Levy, my Chief of Staff is
4 going to respond to that question.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

6 SHIRLEY LEVY: Thank you Chair. Yes, that money
7 was one time federal money through the American
8 Rescue Plan, so we could not repeat that program.
9 Nevertheless, we do fund - we show a commitment to
10 individual artists through our robust program with
11 our local arts council's. Every year we have a
12 dedicated funding stream that goes to them and they
13 act as our conduit to serve individual artists across
14 the five boroughs through their services and grant
15 programs.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, the cultural
17 community has asked for \$5 million to increase
18 staffing at DCLA for the agency to provide efficient
19 and timely support to the field. Does the agency
20 believe it has an adequate number of staff to run all
21 these great programs and initiatives?

22 LAURIE CUMBO: Our agency is currently thrilled
23 that we had an increase of six to our headcount.
24 This really brings us to a level which we can more
25 effectively get resources out the door for many of

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2 our organizations. This is really in response to
3 what so many of you and the cultural community have
4 called for. It's really a call for better
5 transparency, more effectiveness and getting funds
6 and resources out the door in a timely fashion. So,
7 this increased an addition six to our headcount.
8 It's getting us far closer to our ability to achieve
9 our goals. We can always do more with more but
10 currently we are working to fill those positions and
11 I'm confident with filling those positions, you are
12 going to see many of the projects that you have
13 funded and others are now going to be taken off hold
14 and we're going to be able to move those projects
15 more efficiently and effectively than before.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: What is the headcount right
17 now?

18 LAURIE CUMBO: The headcount currently right now
19 is 55.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, and is that higher or
21 lower than it's been?

22 LAURIE CUMBO: Our 2017 number was 62
23 individuals. During the pandemic, our numbers
24 reached as low as 48. And so, at this time, to have
25 that increase to 55 puts us in a stronger position to

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2 administer the grants that we have as well as the
3 capital projects and equipment projects that have
4 been put on hold during the pandemic. This increase
5 in the headcount is really going to get us to a place
6 where we can rev up to be able to make sure that
7 organizations get this funding in a timely fashion.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: That's good to hear. Let's
9 talk about the blueprint for economic recovery.

10 LAURIE CUMBO: Let's talk about that.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, the executive budget
12 for DCLA stands at \$155 million. There is \$5.2
13 million in additional funding for FY23 for cultural
14 organizations as outlined in the Mayor's blueprint.
15 What programs and initiatives will the agency
16 implement with this earmarked funding?

17 LAURIE CUMBO: A portion of that funding is going
18 to go to the CBF process because we want to make sure
19 that we're providing even more funding as
20 organizations are coming out of the recovery. So,
21 that's really critical to us. We also have a program
22 that we are administering that's going to help many
23 small organizations, have an opportunity to
24 understand if they are eligible how to prepare
25 themselves for the capital process.

2 So, many not-for-profit organizations spoke to us
3 in terms of expressing how complicated the capital
4 review process is. We wanted to make that process
5 more accessible. So part of what we put forward in
6 the blueprint was that we wanted to see that process
7 more user friendly. We wanted to help organizations
8 understand how to prepare an application and if they
9 were even eligible or ready in order to undertake a
10 large capital campaign project. I wish a program
11 like this existed 20-years ago when I founded my not-
12 for-profit organization because it was really
13 complicated to figure out how to have a capital grant
14 realized. So, this is another aspect of what we will
15 be using the \$5 million that was allocated from the
16 administration during this process.

17 So, that and the CDF and we're looking to see how
18 we would distribute those resources equitably to
19 those two different programs.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, okay Commissioner, I
21 appreciate this. I'm going to hand it over to my Co-
22 Chair Councilman Ossé so he can get some questions in
23 as well. Congratulations again. Thank you.

24 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you so much.
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you Chair Brannan and
3 thank you for responding to those questions
4 Commissioner. I do have a bit of questions before
5 passing them on to my colleagues. In the Fiscal 2023
6 Budget response, the Council called on the
7 administration to support cultural organizations by
8 adding an additional \$50 million in the Fiscal 2023
9 Executive Expense Budget to support cultural
10 institution groups or the cultural institution group
11 and provide across the board grant increases for all
12 CDF recipients and support the city's artists and our
13 cultural community has been advocating for an
14 addition \$100 million.

15 Why is this funding not reflected in the
16 executive budget and at least, why is the Council's
17 response with the \$50 million not reflected in the
18 Executive budget?

19 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you so much for that
20 question, that's essentially what this hearing is
21 about today. So, to get right into the meat and
22 potatoes of this particular hearing, I just want to
23 start off by saying that Mayor Eric Adams has been
24 completely supportive of the Arts and Cultural
25 Committee in New York City. He's excited about it.

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2 He understands its role in the recovery of New York
3 City.

4 The opportunity to have a headcount increase of
5 six individuals one, brings our number in terms of
6 our headcount higher. That's going to give us an
7 opportunity to be able to get more resources out of
8 the door in a timely and efficient fashion.

9 The other aspect of this is that during this
10 process, we're still heavy in the negotiation
11 process. And so, at this time, as I talked about in
12 my opening remarks, we are at a stronger place right
13 now in the budget then we have been in the last two
14 fiscal years. At this point, we're at about \$154
15 million in the Fiscal Year '21 who are at about \$137
16 million. And in Fiscal Year '22 we were at about
17 \$144 million.

18 So, we're at a stronger place right now. What
19 we're not seeing in the budget right now are one time
20 allocations that are added at adoption. That's a
21 critical huge chunk of the budget, the one time
22 allocations. And those are not reflected in what
23 you're seeing right now.

24 The second part of it that we're not seeing at
25 this time as well is the City Council portion of it.

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2 And so, the ability for the City Council as well as
3 the one times and other aspects of the negotiation
4 that are going to happen, that's when you will see
5 the entire budget and to have an adequate snapshot of
6 where we are.

7 To look at the numbers at this time and to make a
8 comparison from one fiscal year to where we are
9 currently is not really a fair assessment for where
10 we are right now. So, we look forward to working
11 with the Council. We look forward to the fight that
12 many are going to have in terms of making sure that
13 the Council initiatives are robust and that those
14 programs continue. And that will be a major part of
15 understanding the entirety of the entire budget.

16 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. And there were not
17 a lot of increases to DCLA's budget in the Fiscal
18 2023 Executive Budget. What we're seeing right now,
19 obviously we'll see those one-timers hopefully within
20 the next couple of months. But one major one was
21 towards the Mayor's Economic Recovery Blueprint for
22 cultural. What DCLA programs or initiatives are a
23 part of the Mayor's Economic Recovery Blueprint?

24 LAURIE CUMBO: One that I am excited about
25 again, is the expansion of the CDF program. And why

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2 I mention that expansion is because we're doing a lot
3 of things that are very new and innovative with CDL.
4 We are raising the floor from \$5,000 for a grant to
5 \$10,000 for a grant. So, organizations that had to
6 fill out so much paperwork for a \$5,000 grant are now
7 going to be elevated to the opportunity to achieve at
8 baseline a \$10,000 grant. That's just one of the
9 reforms we've created.

10 Another element of the reforms that we've created
11 is that we've raised the amount of money that
12 panelists will receive for serving on a panel. So,
13 for an arts leader to serve on a panel, they would
14 receive approximately \$420 to be able to serve on a
15 panel. So, these are elements of the CDF reform that
16 we are looking forward to that are going to elevate
17 the entire field.

18 So, it's that. We're also looking forward to the
19 capital program that I spoke about earlier. The
20 capital program is going to give us an opportunity to
21 be able to help so many organizations that qualify
22 for the opportunity to actually have a capital
23 project happen in their community.

24 So many organizations particularly in the outer
25 boroughs, particularly in our BIPOC communities who

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2 haven't had the experience of building a brand new
3 permanent home, are now going to have the opportunity
4 and the capabilities of seeing and learning how the
5 capital process works so that they can participate in
6 this program.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And just to follow-up on that
8 10K expansion for CDF. Is the \$10,000 the amount
9 given to all organizations who receive funds from
10 CDF, despite the size of the organization?

11 LAURIE CUMBO: So, I just want to be clear about
12 that. We are reopening the panel process. So,
13 during the pandemic, we didn't renew – we didn't have
14 a panel review process in the same way. Everyone
15 that received funding prior to the pandemic, received
16 funding in a renewal basis each year but this year we
17 are opening up the panel review process again and we
18 anticipate at least 1,200 organizations or more will
19 apply but I want to be clear, it is a panel review
20 process. So, if you received \$5,000 last year, it
21 doesn't automatically mean that you're going to
22 receive \$10,000 next year, and 10,000 is just the
23 floor. We have an opportunity an organization could
24 also receive \$100,000. But \$10,000 is the new floor
25 and it's an opportunity for organizations that apply

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2 to begin at \$10,000 versus \$5,000. But I just want
3 to be clear that it's not a renewal. Organizations
4 will have to reapply and again, the application is
5 due May 16th.

6 So, if you are watching this and it's steaming
7 online, please make sure if you haven't gotten your
8 application in, please make sure you do so now.

9 CHAIRPERSON OSSĚ: Thank you for the reminder.

10 I'm sure many people – I got to let people know too.

11 Uh, the Cultural Development Fund is a critical grant
12 for many of our cultural institutions. Yet, as we
13 both discussed the CDF process is one that is
14 critiqued to be an accessible and inequitable. Many
15 of the cultural organizations have told me that they
16 do not know the exact qualifications on which
17 organizations receive funds through the CDF process
18 and which don't. How is DCLA ensuring transparency
19 in the CDF application process?

20 LAURIE CUMBO: We are doing webinars on a regular
21 basis. Many of our webinars are on our website and
22 you can check those webinars out. They have been
23 pre-recorded at this point. So, you can go on to the
24 website. We have done a social media campaign to get
25 the word out. We've sent all Council Members a debt

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2 so that you can take that information and you can
3 share it with your community and arts organizations
4 so that you are prepared for that.

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSĚ: Will DCLA plan to provide –
6 oh, well you did. Well, will DCLA plan to provide
7 the Council and the public with a breakdown of who
8 received funds and how do organizations qualify for
9 funds? And obviously I just heard that you know you
10 did send us that deck. We have received that
11 ourselves but will we be able to see a breakdown of
12 who received those funds?

13 LAURIE CUMBO: You will absolutely be able to see
14 a listing of who received funds. That's the best
15 part about being the Commissioner, that we get to
16 brag of that – about the organizations that we have
17 funded. So, you are absolutely going to see a
18 breakdown of the organizations that we have funded.
19 You will be able to see which communities are
20 receiving funding and you're able to see at this
21 point, we're going to be able to see how much more
22 equitable this process is.

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSĚ: And has DCLA done any targeted
24 outreach to orgs in the outer boroughs and orgs of
25 color for CDF? You know especially when we're

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2 talking about the subject of equity. You know have
3 we been reaching out to immigrant communities and you
4 know communities with a predominantly diverse I guess
5 demographic.

6 LAURIE CUMBO: We have done a very heavy lift in
7 terms of making sure that we had a marketing campaign
8 that reaches out to all of the organizations. So,
9 organizations that have applied to the Department of
10 Cultural Affairs, passed and present have been sent
11 notifications numerous about the fact that the CDF
12 process is open. We've also utilized our
13 relationship with many of our City Council partners
14 and elected officials because we are also counting on
15 you because nobody knows your district better than
16 you. Nobody can advocate for your organizations
17 better than you.

18 So, this is a complete partnership process. The
19 more you advocate, the more that you speak to the
20 people in your communities, at your community wards,
21 at the police precinct Council meetings, at all of
22 the hearings in Town Halls. The more that you
23 communicate, I know many of you are on social media
24 and are social media magnets, such as yourself. You
25 getting on that social media channel and doing a

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2 video would be game changing. So, we have done our
3 part in terms of promoting this to the larger city.

4 Also making sure that organizations that applied
5 previously, whether they were awarded or not are also
6 given an opportunity to apply again and we've reached
7 out to those organizations.

8 Our webinars have had anywhere from 350 to 400
9 people attend each of those events, so the outpouring
10 of support and people interested and we have already
11 from the applications that are coming in, see an
12 increase. We had approximately about 1,000 people
13 that apply in previous years. We believe that that
14 number is going to dramatically increase this year
15 because the need is so great and so many
16 organizations are looking forward to applying this
17 year.

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSĚ: Great and is the agency
19 planning to allocate additional funding aside from
20 CDF to organizations working in low income
21 neighborhoods in areas most affected by COVID-19.

22 LAURIE CUMBO: Now, I want our Chief of Staff
23 Shirley Levy whose working on an incredible project.
24 Who has been doing this for a number of years and
25 she's going to talk more about that.

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2 SHIRLEY LEVY: Hi, there. Just very quickly want
3 to update you on social impact of the arts, which is
4 a research project that you actually Chair like to
5 site about the social wellbeing of our communities
6 and how rights and culture really influence that.

7 The first study was conducted in 2017 with a
8 number of private partners and our cultural sector
9 and we hope to issue a second research study, an
10 update to that report this coming year, which is good
11 news I think for our agency and for all of our
12 partners and advocates for arts and culture. And
13 with those findings we do have – we have been in the
14 past able to allocate additional funding outside of
15 CDF or on top of CDF, four organizations that meet
16 particular parameters that we found through sign up.
17 So, organizations in civic clusters. We can benefit
18 from additional resources, these tend to be smaller
19 organizations, community organizations BIPOC led or
20 serving organizations. We use the sign up research
21 and add funding on top of CDF for those
22 organizations.

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

24 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you so much. Thank you and
25 we're really excited about that because it gives us

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2 an opportunity to recognize what you know so well in
3 terms of communities that have art and culture in a
4 very robust way. We see that the numbers on every
5 other level from education to health were all
6 improved dramatically.

7 So, this is a second chance in the funding cycle
8 to be able to support those organizations who are in
9 those communities doing that work very specifically
10 and we're looking forward to that part of the budget
11 process.

12 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Amazing. So, let's talk about
13 headcount and DCLA staffing because I know that there
14 are five additional roles that are being included and
15 you know even talking to -

16 LAURIE CUMBO: Six.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Six. Even talking to you know
18 cultural organizations, especially the smaller ones
19 that apply for DCLA funding, I do believe that you
20 know DCLA does need more support to get through these
21 applications and to review you know the organizations
22 that are doing the work but also do want to receive
23 funding. The Departments Fiscal 2023 Executive
24 Budget provides for 55 full-time positions across all
25

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2 divisions which is - is it three more than the Fiscal
3 2022 or six more?

4 LAURIE CUMBO: Six more.

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Six more. Uhm, which is in
6 their adopted budgets. What positions in particular
7 were added or will be added?

8 LAURIE CUMBO: I'm going to give you - hold on
9 one moment I'm going to give you the exact titles.
10 The Exec Budget includes the addition of six full-
11 time headcount baseline starting in Fiscal '23, the
12 restoration of two out of three full-time positions
13 that were cut in the Jan Plan. One headcount to
14 convert one programs per diem to full-time. That's
15 protocol. Addition of three new positions, two
16 capital equipment project managers and one ACO unit
17 position.

18 So, we are going to have a very robust staffing
19 opportunity here and I'm just really excited about
20 the capital improvement project managers because our
21 capital projects, particularly the equipment division
22 really needs that. Because as City Council members,
23 you all fund so many of the projects in terms of the
24 HVAC systems, the opportunity to have computers and
25 smart boards and all of those things, which so many

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2 of our schools and cultural institutions and all
3 alike have come forward saying that they need more
4 of.

5 So, this is going to be really critical on our
6 side that we're able to have this equipment
7 opportunity in terms of individuals that can know the
8 capital system, get those projects out of the door
9 and take many of the projects that could have been
10 put on hold during the pandemic into operation.

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you and does the agency
12 believe it has adequate members of staff now to
13 officially run all the programs and initiatives?
14 Especially when it comes to running the CDF program
15 in an equitable way and ensuring that discretionary
16 funding reimbursements are done promptly?

17 LAURIE CUMBO: This increase in our headcount is
18 going to bring the agency into a much higher and
19 efficient level in terms of our ability to be able to
20 operate the organization and to take many of the
21 projects that have been put on hold during the
22 pandemic into full operation and we're looking
23 forward to that. So, I feel very confident really as
24 a new Commissioner, coming in with an increase of six
25 to the headcount which is going to be game changing

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2 for this agency and we're really looking forward to
3 hiring those individuals and getting them up to speed
4 and implementing these programs.

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right, so for DCLA programs
6 and initiatives, I have a couple questions to ask
7 pertaining to this topic. Our CIGs took a huge
8 financial impact due to stay at home owners and had
9 to close their doors during the pandemic, cutting off
10 a huge chunk of their income. How is the DCLA
11 planning to support our CIGs as we look towards COVID
12 recovery?

13 LAURIE CUMBO: Can you repeat that question
14 again? Part of it might have went out during –

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Sure, our CIGs took a huge
16 financial impact due to stay at home owners and had
17 to close their doors during the pandemic, cutting off
18 a huge chunk of their income. How is the DCLA
19 planning to support our CIGs as we look towards COVID
20 recovery?

21 LAURIE CUMBO: I'm going to turn this over right
22 now to Sheelah Feinberg my Deputy Commissioner, whose
23 been working with many of the cultural institutions
24 during the pandemic, particularly the CIGs to address
25 this question.

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2 SHEELAH FEINBERG: Good afternoon. So, a couple
3 of things. One is I just want to reenforce that we
4 DCLA's for all of cultural institutions, we're doing
5 everything we can for everybody. We know that our
6 center took a huge hit during the pandemic, so
7 whether that was a local, smaller organization up to
8 a CIG that you're talking about right now. I just
9 want to be very clear, our support to the CIGs and to
10 our center did not waiver during this time period.
11 So, I just want to be very upfront about that. In
12 terms of any additional asks that the CIGs are
13 making, that's a separate conversation but we support
14 the CIGs currently as we have been historically
15 through our operating subsidies.

16 We also help the CIGs and the sector with our
17 capital projects that the Commissioner was just
18 talking about. Again, going back to the headcount
19 increase, this will help a lot of our sector get
20 their projects done particularly the less sexy ones
21 but the more vital ones for programming which are the
22 top equipment purchases and projects.

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you and due to the
24 pandemic, you know there were many layoffs and many
25 New Yorkers lost their jobs at these cultural

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2 institutions. How is DCLA working to support the
3 CIGs and other cultural organizations to bring back
4 jobs in the cultural sector?

5 LAURIE CUMBO: Every organization has a different
6 set of issues. And so, each organization, we work
7 individually with to understand and access their
8 needs. The pandemic for some was debilitating in
9 terms of their budget numbers. For others they
10 sustain great success, particularly many of our
11 organizations who had outdoor facilities and outdoor
12 spaces. They did really well financially during the
13 pandemic. So, each organization is a case by case
14 basis. Of course the federal support that many of
15 the organizations received during the pandemic helped
16 many of those organizations kick start their
17 programming in terms of reopening their doors but to
18 say that we have a blanket approach in terms of how
19 we bring back individuals workforce because there are
20 all kinds of issues from labor issues to
21 organizations that have limited staff or have
22 employees that work on contract or per diem. So,
23 with each different organization, we take an
24 individualized approach in terms of how we assist and
25 support and help.

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2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: So, I do understand that it's
3 not a you know a blanket approach but for those
4 cultural institution groups that did see you know
5 severe losses and jobs, what has been the approach to
6 help them?

7 LAURIE CUMBO: I would say currently right now,
8 we are again meeting with different organizations and
9 they are expressing to us what their needs are and we
10 are seeing as an agency, how we can reach their needs
11 individually as an organization.

12 Because each one has a different set of issues as
13 it pertains to individuals that were laid off.
14 Again, federal funding jump started a lot of that and
15 helped many of the organizations address those
16 issues. But I'm telling you, every day a different
17 organization comes to us in terms of say, they need
18 to have a strategy in terms of how they bring back
19 their staff. How do they increase many organizations
20 have also had to decrease the amount of hours or days
21 that are open, so some had to decrease staff. Some
22 had to decrease days of operation. And so each
23 organization is working with a different set of
24 circumstances. And so, it is challenging work but it
25 is the work that we know is going to bring back the

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2 City of New York. I wish I could say that there was
3 a balloon of funding that exists to bring back all New
4 York City workers. But that's really not a reality
5 at this time. we are just simply working to make
6 sure that we meet every organizations individual
7 needs and doing that as effectively as we can with
8 different partners and different agencies to see how
9 we can be most effective.

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Many individual artists have
11 struggled financially during the pandemic and have
12 lost their main sources of income due to stay at home
13 orders. From conversations I hear on culture at
14 three calls and from conversations I have had with
15 advocates, there's a call to continue support for and
16 expand the City Artist Corp. How will DCLA work to
17 support the City Artist Corp.? And how much will be
18 allocated to individual artists through this program
19 if it is expanded.

20 LAURIE CUMBO: I want to say that our agency
21 right now is working very hard and effectively at
22 increasing support and funding for our arts councils
23 across the five borough. So, our arts councils are
24 where so many local artists get their funding and get
25 their support and we are continuing to remain

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2 committed to our arts Council's to make sure that
3 they are robust. That they are vibrant and they have
4 the resources and necessary support to support that
5 arts community. Our Arts Council's are where our
6 organizations apply but it's also where artists have
7 an opportunity to apply for funding. And for many
8 that - for many organizations or many artists, that's
9 their opportunity to receive funding. The CUNY Corp
10 program is critical and it's essential. We are still
11 in budget negotiations around funding and support and
12 those are typically decided at adoption. And so,
13 we're going to continue to work with our partners at
14 CUNY and our cultural organizations to assess all of
15 their needs, so that we can better support and fund
16 this incredible program that produces art leaders.
17 And hopefully in the future, we can continue to make
18 programs like that more accessible to more.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: So, at this point, you would
20 say that we don't have you know a numerical amount
21 for how much will be allocated or even a percentage?

22 LAURIE CUMBO: Those decisions are determined at
23 the adoption of the budget. So, it's premature for
24 us to say what those numbers would be at this time.
25 So, we don't have the answer to that question right

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2 now but that information will become more readily
3 available when it comes time for adoption. But it is
4 certainly that this agency and myself certainly care
5 deeply about. Because I understand that in calls for
6 diversity, equity and inclusion and the opportunities
7 to have more individuals of color in our workforce as
8 well as in our boards, we need to have a pipeline.
9 So, it's certainly an initiative that I care deeply
10 about and I know you and many members of this
11 committee also care deeply about. Because this is a
12 pipeline to actually achieving the goals. So, it's
13 something that we are deeply committed to.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Great and I'm going to end off
15 with asking some questions in regards to capital
16 funding. How many active capital projects does the
17 agency currently have? And how many cultural
18 organizations are these at? And then what is the
19 progress on these capital projects that you are aware
20 of?

21 LAURIE CUMBO: I'm going to turn it over at this
22 time to Phillipa Shao who is our DCLA Director of
23 Finance, who can give you the exact numbers of the
24 amount of capital projects in our portfolio
25 currently.

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2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Great.

3 LAURIE CUMBO: Phillippa, you can unmute
4 yourself.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You're unmuted, so you should
6 be able to -

7 LAURIE CUMBO: Phillippa, we can't hear you.
8 Okay, in the interim, we're going to have Shirley
9 Levy.

10 SHIRLEY LEVY: Hi there, thank you. Uhm, the
11 exact numbers we don't have ready but I can tell you
12 that we have approximately 250 active capital
13 projects at approximately 200 organizations. Those
14 organizations span the five boroughs, different
15 disciplines and different sizes. In terms of the
16 progress, again, each project has its own pace
17 because of the unique nature of that specific
18 project, whether it's equipment or renovation or a
19 complete new building. So, you know we do our best
20 with the resources that we have to move every project
21 a pace and if you questions about specific projects
22 in your district or elsewhere, we can follow-up with
23 you offline and give you an update on those. Thank
24 you.

25 LAURIE CUMBO: Awesome.

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2 CHAIRPERSON OSSĚ: Thank you and what is the
3 breakdown of DCLA's capital projects by borough? Is
4 that something that I could follow-up about after
5 this as well? As well as how DCLA tracks its
6 projects this way.

7 LAURIE CUMBO: We'll definitely get you that
8 breakdown in terms of capital projects by borough. I
9 understand the importance of knowing the number and
10 we will definitely get you each capital project by
11 borough for the entire Committee and the Council to
12 be able to review.

13 CHAIRPERSON OSSĚ: Great and the last question I
14 have is, how does DCLA work to ensure it's capital
15 spending is spread across the city in an equitable
16 way?

17 LAURIE CUMBO: So, right now we're in the review
18 for the capital process and we are looking at
19 organizations. We take it really organization by
20 organization and what they are requesting. Where
21 they are in the budget process, partnerships which
22 are really key. So, I would say that the most
23 effective way for us to be able to fund an
24 organization is if the borough president, the City
25

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2 Council and DCLA work collaboratively together to
3 understand our capital desires.

4 So, if we work collaboratively together with the
5 agency, we will be able to have projects that are
6 done on time and are completed. The challenge that
7 happens is when we do not work collaboratively. You
8 may have projects that are your priority. The
9 Administration may have projects that are their
10 priority and we may fund them but we may not fund
11 them together. And if we don't fund them together,
12 it takes longer for that organizations capital goals
13 to be realized. So, the ability to have partnership
14 will certainly help and assist in terms of making
15 sure that capital projects are equitable all across
16 the City of New York.

17 And so, I look forward to working with each of
18 the Council Members and our Borough Presidents to
19 determine what are their priorities? What do they
20 want to see in their community and how we can make
21 that possible?

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSĚ: Thank you Commissioner Cumbo
23 and I just hope all my colleagues on this call who
24 have been tuning in and listening to the answers to
25 this question just understand that our cultural

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2 organizations, our cultural institutions must be a
3 priority of ours for the budget. I'm hoping that in
4 all of your respective conversations with the
5 administration and with the Speaker we're advocating
6 on behalf of your cultural organizations and
7 institutions because of how I said in opening, how
8 deeply significant they are in the recovery of our
9 city.

10 So, thank you for those answer Commissioner and
11 I'm looking forward to hearing from the rest of my
12 colleagues about their questions.

13 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you so much. Thank you so
14 much Chair Ossé. It's an honor to work with you on
15 this Committee. I'm confident that we are going to
16 do great things and I just want to reiterate from my
17 time in the Council, I have learned the power of
18 partnership. And so, I really look forward to
19 partnering with my Council colleagues and making sure
20 that we have an opportunity to work together to
21 realize your vision. Our goal at the Department of
22 Cultural Affairs is to realize shared visions, so
23 that we can get projects completed efficiently and
24 effectively, particularly for those communities most
25 in need. So, thank you so much.

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2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chairs Brannan and
4 Ossé. We also have been joined by Council Members
5 Carr and Moya. We'll turn to Council Member
6 questions and he needs no introduction, we know who
7 we are turning to first, Council Member Barron.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Excuse me sir, you're
10 blowing up my spot. You're letting everybody know my
11 strategy now. Don't do that man.

12 Good afternoon Commissioner.

13 LAURIE CUMBO: Good afternoon Council Member
14 Barron.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I appreciate you bringing
16 up the Theaters of Color. I think it's critical but
17 you know the reason why we had to create the Theaters
18 of Color is because of the racism in the Department
19 of Cultural Affairs in terms of the allocation of
20 resources and while, working with the City Council
21 and those, Woody King who really initiated a lot of
22 the organizing and we also have to always give credit
23 to Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee and Barbara Ann Teer, who
24 made their transition. So, we'll always be indebted
25 to them but you now the \$700,000 to \$3.7 or whatever

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2 the millions were, is dismally low for these theaters
3 of color and it is hypocritical for us to be in a
4 city that is 65 percent Black, Latino, Latina and
5 Asian. And yet the CIGs get the most money or the
6 big White institutions and that has been happening
7 over the years.

8 So, collectively, the Committee of Coalition of
9 Theaters, over 350 years they have that kind of
10 history and they brought out people like the
11 honorable Felicia Rashaad, Denzel Washington, Samuel
12 Jackson, Morgan Freeman, Laurence Fishburne. If you
13 could give me a sense of what's happening, the macro
14 picture you know in terms of Theaters of Color and
15 Black, Latino and Asian, so what we should be getting
16 in terms of the resources available. That's the
17 first part. The second is the question of the
18 budget. You know according to all of the budget
19 information out on paper documented, that the \$145
20 million that was increased to -

21 LAURIE CUMBO: Council Member Barron, you're
22 breaking up a little bit.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Oh, could you hear me
24 now?

25 LAURIE CUMBO: I can hear you now.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay, the \$145 million or
3 the Preliminary Budget that was increased in the
4 Executive does not accurately represent the \$78.1
5 million that was cut from the adopted budget in 2022.
6 That was \$230 million and it was cut back down to
7 \$155 million. That's a huge drop off. So, one, how
8 are you going to make that up and where is - how is
9 that going to hurt and finally, and I'll let you take
10 it from there. With friends like that, who need
11 enemies Commissioner. That's a huge cut my sister.
12 You know you got to talk to your brother and say, he
13 needs to put that money back. But thank you
14 Commissioner.

15 LAURIE CUMBO: As long as I have you, I know I'm
16 okay. So, I'm just going to begin with the Theaters
17 of Color. I want to first start by thanking you and
18 all of the dynamic leaders that you spoke about who
19 helped bring this to fruition. The wonderful part
20 about this is your enthusiasm for it and you being a
21 founding member of it. Because we on the DCLA side,
22 it's not in our purview to increase funding for the
23 Theaters of Color. That happens on the Council side.

24 So, during the budget negotiation process, it's
25 really critical for organizations that you all want

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2 to see supported. That you put all your energies and
3 focus -

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: If I may Commissioner
5 please, I hate to interrupt you but I only got a
6 minute and a half.

7 LAURIE CUMBO: Let me just finish one thing that
8 I just want to get to.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Just one last thing on
10 the correction on that.

11 LAURIE CUMBO: Okay.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I meant how can the
13 Department of Cultural Affairs fund these
14 organizations? I know we got to increase ours but I
15 was talking about the Department of Cultural Affairs
16 lack of adequately funding these groups, which is why
17 we had to create the Theaters of Colors in the first
18 place. So, I just wanted to get that clear. Sorry,
19 for cutting you off.

20 LAURIE CUMBO: No, let me just say, I appreciate
21 that. I too share that same concern right, so there
22 were discussions when I was in the Council that we
23 take Theaters of Color out of the City Council and
24 place it into the Department of Cultural Affairs and
25 baseline that funding. The Council Members at that

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2 time said, that they still want to have control over
3 who gets the funding. Once it comes over to the
4 Department of Cultural Affairs, that takes the power
5 away from those Council Members ability to say, who
6 gets what and how much they get.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I got that. So, I don't
8 think they should take it out from the Council but
9 I'm saying let that happen and additional to that,
10 the Department of Cultural Affairs needs to add money
11 to that, not necessarily put them under and take the
12 power away from the Council. They could keep that
13 but the Department of Cultural Affairs has to put a
14 greater share of their budget into that.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16 LAURIE CUMBO: I'll just complete with that. So,
17 one of the things that we want to make sure. We want
18 to make sure that organizations like the Theaters of
19 Color continue to grow and continue to expand.

20 We can do that with your partnership but we can
21 also start to look at private resources and
22 partnerships and opportunities to potentially
23 consider that. But I do want to draw your attention
24 to the CDF process and to let you know, as the CDF
25 level of funding is increasing, we especially, this

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2 was one of the things that I wanted to see happen was
3 that we increased the amount of funding but that we
4 also put the power in the power of the Council
5 Members hands to suggest panelists. Now, just
6 hearing more panelists, it's kind of like yeah, yeah,
7 yeah, yeah. Like that sounds good but the reality is
8 and I'm sure you sat on panels, when you have
9 panelists who represent the communities where these
10 organizations thrive, live and grow, it makes a world
11 of difference. Previously, when you're talking about
12 issues of racism and those types of dynamics, if you
13 don't have the right people on the panel review
14 process, you will see the same issues occur.

15 So, if we can change the dynamic, we can really
16 change the dynamic in terms of who receives funding
17 through the CDF. And to answer your question on the
18 capital.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Yes ma'am, right.

20 LAURIE CUMBO: And the entire city budget, what
21 you're seeing again is a snapshot of the budget
22 preadoption. I want to just stress because this is
23 very interesting and important part of this. It does
24 not include the one time. It does not include the

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2 one time allocations that happen at adoption, which
3 are a huge chunk of the budget.

4 It does not include any elements of what the City
5 Council contributes to that as well and other
6 elements of the negotiation. So, what some people
7 are describing as a cut, is really not a fair
8 comparison. You can't compare this moment that we're
9 in preadoption with where we were at adoption in the
10 last fiscal year. So, it's critical that we compare
11 apples to apples and oranges to oranges in this way.
12 And so, I want to make sure that people understand
13 that Mayor Eric Adams is absolutely committed to the
14 arts and cultural community, which is why we're at a
15 stronger place in fiscal year '23 than we have been
16 in the past two fiscal years and we haven't added the
17 one time allocations and we've also not added at this
18 time, what I know is going to be a huge, bigger than
19 ever City Council contribution to the arts and
20 cultural budget.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: If I may Mr. Chair just
22 for a second, having been through 12 budgets, you
23 know I do understand the process and I do understand
24 in 2022, there was a larger preliminary budget before
25 the final adoption than your budget right now.

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2 So, how do you go from a larger preliminary
3 budget before the Council put all of their stuff in,
4 before anything came from the feds, the 2022
5 preliminary budget is larger than this budget that we
6 adopt at this moment. So, yes -

7 LAURIE CUMBO: We might have different numbers.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: No, no, this is the
9 Council's numbers. I ain't making these numbers up.
10 I'm just saying that this is a cut and whatever is
11 going to be restored, we'll deal with that at the end
12 but at this point, as you accurately mentioned, we're
13 at a point in the process at this point, this numbers
14 is lower than we were at the point last budget. But
15 I'll leave it alone, so others can ask their
16 questions.

17 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you Council Member Barron.
18 We will have to do a comparison of numbers offline
19 but I appreciate your question and definitely
20 appreciate your enthusiasm for Theaters of Color and
21 many of the initiatives that you were integral in
22 creating during your previous time in the Council.
23 I'm looking forward to working with you in the
24 future.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you.

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2 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you so much.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member
4 Barron. Next, we'll turn to Council Member Brewer.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. I
7 share your vision and hope for funding for the arts.
8 I have one question, when you mentioned May 16th and
9 just like others, I have appointed people to sit on
10 that panel for the last I don't know -

11 LAURIE CUMBO: Yes, thank you.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know but it's hard. I
13 appreciate the extra per diem but I also have a
14 question. May 16th, is the day, there's nobody, I've
15 talked to all the member of the Manhattan delegation
16 in the last few minutes and they don't know that that
17 is. So, what is May 16th deadline?

18 LAURIE CUMBO: May 16th is the deadline for the
19 CDF application. So, this year, we're asking all
20 organizations, we're going paperless this year.
21 We're asking all organizations all throughout the
22 City of New York to turn in their CDF application.
23 So, this is really critical.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh, I understand that
25 Commissioner but just so you know, nobody in

2 Manhattan knows anything about it. So, I'm just
3 wondering if we could extend the deadline. Because
4 certainly you have [INAUDIBLE 3:13:21], I'm sure but
5 to be honest with you, I've just talked to five of my
6 colleagues and nobody knows what I'm talking about
7 and I'm pretty on top of not everything but I try
8 really hard. So, I don't know, nobody knows a thing
9 about and then maybe, you may know all of the groups
10 but there maybe some that you know fell through the
11 cracks because we, you know we want them all to apply
12 particularly as we know, this is geared towards the
13 smaller culturals.

14 So, I just want, you know nobody knows a thing
15 about this except maybe the group but as far as I
16 know the officials do not. So, you might want to
17 extend the deadline. You know we can talk about it
18 offline but I would love to - we have a newsletter
19 that goes to 100,000 people and I'd love to be able
20 to tell people about it, so.

21 LAURIE CUMBO: Council Member, can I just respond
22 to that very quickly? We have sent the debt to all
23 of the Council Members throughout the city because it
24 was our expectation that sending all of the Council
25 Members the debt. The communication and promotion

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2 that they would be able to do that. Unfortunately,
3 we are not able to extend the deadline. This is due
4 to -

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Nobody knows a thing
6 about it. I just talked to them.

7 LAURIE CUMBO: I wouldn't go so far as to say
8 nobody knows a thing about it. Each of our webinars
9 have between 350 and 400 applicants.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh, I know that the
11 groups do. I'm just letting you know elected
12 officials do not. So, I don't know what happened but
13 I just talked to five of them in the last few
14 minutes.

15 LAURIE CUMBO: Okay, I uhm -

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We'll try to tell people
17 but it's I don't know.

18 LAURIE CUMBO: We have - I apologize but we have
19 three days left to get it out.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know, I can help, I
21 know, I'm just saying and it's just frustrating to me
22 having done this for 20-years and not know. Okay,
23 that's not a lot.

24 LAURIE CUMBO: We want to send it out to you,
25 yes.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, I'd love to. So,
3 nobody knows. And second, I agree with the others
4 that I think the cultural group as a whole is asking
5 for \$100 million more. An additional \$100,000
6 million because of all the things that they've been
7 through. And I just wanted to know for things like
8 tourism, \$10 million; I think you know this,
9 Workforce \$10 million. And the other one that I
10 wanted to know if we have any idea about what we are
11 spending is for deaf and disabled communities. The
12 cultural community is asking for \$5 million. So, I'm
13 just wondering are we close to that \$100 million.
14 Obviously the breakdown is cultural equity fund,
15 tourism, workforce, accessibility and then individual
16 artists for the wonderful city artist program.

17 So, is there any hope of getting close to - the
18 City Council will negotiate. I know, I've done it
19 before. I think we really need to be closer to the
20 \$100 million. People love your agency. They want
21 your agency to be funded. So, are we - like is there
22 something that you would see in this list that
23 perhaps does need more funding?

24 LAURIE CUMBO: Again, I would state that much of
25 what you're discussing and asking about will be items

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2 that will be realized at adoption. I too have a lot
3 of hope. I always keep hope alive but on a very
4 serious note, uhm, this Council shares many of the
5 same priorities and many of the same desires in terms
6 of equity and the arts and culture of New York City
7 reflecting the diversity of this city and so, much of
8 what is being put forward are elements of the budget
9 that I would say that we have a shared – a desire to
10 see a more robust, a more vibrant and a more well-
11 funded cultural community and that happens through
12 negotiation. We are participating very actively in
13 that negotiation and I am confident that we are going
14 to continue to work in partnership to realize many of
15 the goals that we all share.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 LAURIE CUMBO: But at this time, I can't respond
19 to that question now.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Maybe you – I listened to
21 your testimony but are there some new needs that you
22 maybe are funded that you think the sector could use
23 at this time. Probably you know, had so much
24 experience in the past.

25

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2 LAURIE CUMBO: We can always do more with more as
3 we say with at the Department of Cultural Affairs,
4 but I would say right now, what we're really focused
5 on are making the programs that we're already doing,
6 more robust, more transparent and more equitable.
7 This opportunity of reopening the CDF process and
8 doing the panel review process after it not happening
9 during the pandemic is a huge lift for the agency in
10 terms of reigniting our cultural community, getting
11 us back into the review process. Having so many more
12 panelists. I believe we're looking for 400 panelists
13 to review these applications.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right as the most, so we
15 haven't done it in 20-years. We have a huge number,
16 so we'll try to come up with some list for you.

17 LAURIE CUMBO: Uhm, hmm.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right, thank you and we
19 know again, just so you it's a challenge but we'll
20 try to work on it. Thank you.

21 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you so much Council Member
22 Brewer.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you and next, we'll
24 turn to Council Member Carr.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Hello Commissioner, it's
3 great to see you. Congratulations on your
4 appointments.

5 LAURIE CUMBO: You as well. Thank you.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: I'm very happy to see you
7 at the helm of DCLA as all of our CIGs and cultural
8 leaders here in Staten Island. So, my questions are
9 with respect, I'm going to start with CDF. Chi,
10 Council Member Ossé was talking about earlier. I sat
11 on CDF panels for several years as a staffer on behalf
12 of the borough delegation and one of the things that
13 I noticed and I'm glad you're doing the webinars and
14 the outreach. Is that, often times the applications
15 did not reflect the quality of the cultural services
16 and institutions who were seeking funds from DCLA.
17 And I just talked to DCLA staff several times about
18 you know what can we do to kind of queue in these
19 applicants to maybe improve their applications for
20 the future.

21 Because sometimes really critical groups were on
22 the verge of not making the cut so to speak because
23 their applications didn't really demonstrate the
24 worthiness of what I know as someone who has been to
25 these institutions that they provide. And so, I'd

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2 love to kind of hear from you and the agency about
3 you know after these webinars, after this cycle was
4 done, whose really participating and what I can do to
5 kind of bring these cultural institutions to the
6 table with you guys to kind of prepare better for the
7 future.

8 LAURIE CUMBO: That's an incredible question and
9 I too, when I was a Council Member experienced that
10 as well as when I served as a panelist, where you
11 would see those great organizations that didn't quite
12 put together the right proposal.

13 I'll just take a step back in many ways. As a
14 Council Member, what I did in terms of serving my
15 district, I held my own CDF panel. How do you fill
16 out the CDF proposal? And brought in different
17 leaders. We worked with the Coney Island JCC and
18 they helped us to do Q&A. How to fill out the
19 application and to do those elements of it. We also
20 have had here several webinars. Some organizations
21 uhm, many organizations participate in it, right.

22 Other organizations sometimes feel like, I've got
23 it. I know what to do or unfortunately some
24 organizations wait till Sunday night to do the
25 application and let me tell you, I get it and I

2 understand. It's not like they're twiddling their
3 thumbs somewhere, they're on the ground doing the
4 work. They are giving school tours. They're getting
5 ready for summer camp. They are doing all that
6 critical work. They are giving school tours.
7 They're getting ready for summer camp. They're doing
8 all of that critical work. But I would say the main
9 thing that we've done is this webinar series. We've
10 also done a huge social media campaign. So, much of
11 this work is online and as a Council Member, I would
12 strongly encourage to do your own town hall style.
13 How do you fill out the application. DCLA is a good
14 partner to do those types of programs and application
15 seminars with. So, please consider us a resource but
16 also organizations in your community that you can
17 partner with on how to do the right application for
18 your group and just continue you know to talk to
19 roots and encouraging them. Don't wait till the last
20 minute and also, don't think you just got it.

21 Like, processes change. You always need a
22 refresher and it's always great to be in the field
23 working with your colleagues in terms of hearing the
24 questions they might have might be a question that
25 you haven't answered. But I really thank you for the

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2 question because that's something that I care deeply
3 about and it's heartbreaking when you're on a panel
4 and you know that the organization is doing great
5 work and your like, why didn't you feel out the
6 application the right way. So, I totally get it.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Without a doubt
8 Commissioner and I appreciate your answer and I'll
9 definitely work with you and your team on setting up
10 something like that for the future and looking
11 forward to hearing the feedback from this year.

12 In terms of, uh, I have two other questions, so
13 I'll bundle them together. Uhm, the first is, I
14 support the requests for the additional \$100 million
15 for DCLA that our cultural citywide are pushing. In
16 particular the \$50 million for our CIGs and I'm just
17 wondering in terms of the marketing and everything
18 that the DCLA does to support our culturals and the
19 opportunity we have to kind of take advantage of the
20 fact that more people I think are staying home post
21 pandemic and trying to do some work staycation style
22 activities with their families. What we can do and
23 what's already being done to promote Staten Island
24 culturals in borough not just the tourists to see
25 what we can do to make sure that folks in the borough

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2 know the great institutions they have and what
3 they're putting on to kind of amplify the voices that
4 they're already bringing to the table. And so, I'd
5 just love to get the numbers on that in terms of the
6 breakdown of what Borough CIGs and culturals get in
7 that regard at the moment. And then I'd also love to
8 know because you referenced you know adding a CIG
9 from your community or you or a Council Member. Is
10 that a conversation that you're open to having about
11 adding a CIG or two into the Staten Island portfolio?
12 Because I think that could be a great benefit to the
13 cultural community here.

14 LAURIE CUMBO: I'll just say that we are open to
15 all conversations. We want to hear from the field,
16 we want to hear from our colleagues in government in
17 terms of what's important to you. We are looking at
18 all avenues in our portfolio in terms of increasing
19 diversity. In terms of increasing equity to making
20 sure that all our boroughs are adequately served.

21 We have many different uhm, ways of entry into
22 the Department of Cultural Affairs and many different
23 programs in our portfolio. The Cultural Institutions
24 Group is one but there are many others, and so, we
25 want to explore all avenues to understand how can we

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2 best serve the organizations in our community? And
3 the Cultural Institutions Group is one vehicle but
4 there are many vehicles and on the Commissioner side,
5 we are certainly looking at different ways towards
6 opportunities for more equitable funding.

7 I just went to the uhm, not in your district but
8 I just went to the St. George Theater for their 92nd
9 Anniversary last weekend and it was incredible.

10 SERGEANT AT ARM: Time expired.

11 LAURIE CUMBO: So, I certainly you know have been
12 to many of the cultural institutions in Staten Island
13 and see uhm, just how important they are to a full
14 New York City experience. And so, you can count on
15 my partnership and being in Staten Island with you,
16 to support many of the goals and initiatives in order
17 to determine how we better amplify Staten Island.

18 But I would encourage you during the next NYC and
19 Company Budget Hearing to also discuss with them ways
20 in terms of what tourism dollars they are spending in
21 Staten Island but also setting up specific meetings
22 with NYC & Company to understand what is their Staten
23 Island marketing plan for your borough.

24

25

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Appreciate it Commissioner
3 and thank you Chairs for the opportunity to ask
4 questions.

5 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you. I'll see you soon.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member
7 Carr. We also have been joined by Council Member
8 Salamanca and next, we'll turn to Council Member
9 Dinowitz.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Hi Commissioner. It's
12 great to see you again.

13 LAURIE CUMBO: Great to see you. Last time I saw
14 you it was in the Bronx.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yes, I our current
16 Majority Leader but I miss seeing you up there. I
17 have a few questions. First, you know it was
18 reported recently that the Department of Education is
19 struggling to spend federal stimulus money. Excuse
20 me, federal stimulus money and I was wondering if
21 DCLA is also the recipient of federal stimulus money
22 and if so, if it is all spent or if you need help
23 spending it?

24

25

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2 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you Spider – I mean, Council
3 Member Dinowitz. I feel like you're about to change
4 into spiderman like in the show.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I'm home with a kid.

6 LAURIE CUMBO: Fortunately and unfortunately all
7 of our federal capital dollars have been spent at
8 this time. So, I thoroughly understand the question
9 but we do not have federal dollars in our portfolio
10 at this time to spend throughout our robust cultural
11 community.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Well, I will tell you
13 that it's good that you're not leaving money on the
14 table, right.

15 LAURIE CUMBO: Oh, we would never do that.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: So, I was looking on
17 the website and there are grants you give to
18 organizations. There's NeON Arts communities, the
19 City Artist Corp grants. Uhm, but I notice that the
20 Bronx, the NeON grant is one out of – only one out of
21 the seven organizations receiving grants. The City
22 Artist Corp. grants. The Bronx is only the recipient
23 of 11 percent of those grants and there wasn't data
24 available for any of the other grants, that's just
25 what I saw on the website, so one, if you could

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2 share- if you don't have it here, you can show me
3 later what the break in the other grants and
4 programs, how it breaks down by borough because it is
5 often the case in the Bronx is left behind. Whether
6 when every agency and everything but I'm wondering
7 what sort of outreach DCLA does to get more
8 participation for Bronx residents to engage in these
9 programs?

10 LAURIE CUMBO: One, I just want to go back to
11 your first question in terms of the federal funding.
12 So, the federal funding that we did get went to the
13 City Artist Corp citywide. And what that was a
14 program that put funding directly into the hands of
15 artists. I believe it was \$25 million. It was \$25
16 million that individual artists had an opportunity to
17 receive a grant that I believe the baseline for was
18 \$5,000. And they were able to do art projects all
19 throughout New York City and we utilized that as a
20 way to bring funding to individual artists during the
21 pandemic.

22 Would we love another infusion of those federal
23 dollars, yes, we would but we're looking to other
24 ways to revamp this really critical program once
25 again.

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2 Now, in terms of funding for Bronx organizations
3 through several of our initiatives, I'll just say, we
4 have a relationship and we have an opportunity to
5 work collaboratively together. Let's sit down and
6 talk with one another and figure out how we can get
7 more funding into the Bronx and how we can further
8 promote those organizations. We can also send you
9 the numbers in terms of organizations in our
10 portfolio or rather programs, such as the NeON
11 program and many others, so that you have a better
12 understanding of how the Bronx is sparring in those
13 perspective communities but let's utilize the fact
14 that we are colleagues. That we know one another and
15 let's sit down at the same table. I'd love to go to
16 eat with you, walk the neighborhoods with you and
17 really explore how we can bring more resources to the
18 Bronx.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I would love that.
20 You're welcome to the main land anytime and I would
21 love to get those numbers so I get more you know a
22 better sense of how the Bronx is funded and you know
23 it's not about DCLA, it's about the story and we
24 heard the same story with the small business grants
25 and the small business loans.

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2 LAURIE CUMBO: Right.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: But almost none of them
4 went to the Bronx. You hear it all with any agency
5 and any you know with all of these grants and
6 initiatives the Bronx is often left behind. And so,
7 if we have an opportunity to make sure the Bronx is
8 heard, I want to sit down with you and do that. I
9 have one more question and really happy to hear that
10 you mention CUNY Cultural Corp.

11 So, I'll just, with the limited time remaining,
12 I'll just ask, has the funding for this changed from
13 previous years? I guess that's the main question.
14 How has the funding changed and how is the emphasis
15 of the program changed since previous years?

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: I would say we don't at this
17 time, we don't know the funding numbers of what the
18 CUNY Corp program will be. As I'm just coming into
19 the position, I'll have to give you the numbers in
20 terms of how the funding allocations for the program
21 have grown. But it has expanded over the years but I
22 want to get you the exact number so that you can
23 really see how the program has expanded and how it
24 has impacted your district specifically.

25

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: So, thank you. Not
3 just my district but yes, my district but also, the
4 program itself is as you mentioned in your testimony,
5 you know it's about the workforce. It is workforce
6 development; it's providing opportunities to our CUNY
7 students and providing opportunities to our cultural
8 organizations. So, I look forward to you know seeing
9 that information. Of course how we can invest even
10 more in these sorts of programs that leverage our
11 CUNY students and give them opportunities while
12 promoting the arts here in our city.

13 LAURIE CUMBO: Looking forward to it and you can
14 count on my partnership.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And our last question for
17 DCLA will be Council Member Sanchez. Those who are
18 here for parks, just bear with us a few more minutes
19 as we close out the second portion of our hearing.
20 Council Member Sanchez.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you so much and
23 congratulations Commissioner, it's good to see you in
24 this space. So, I mean Council Member Dinowitz just
25 took all of the words from me, which I'm very happy

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2 about but I just want to underscore, you know please
3 do send us that information. I'm right below Council
4 Member Dinowitz in the Northwest Bronx, you know that
5 Kings Bridge all the way down to 170 on Hope Mount
6 Eden and you know we just – we need a lot. This is
7 one of the things I actually hear the most about from
8 our constituents is access to culture, access to the
9 art spaces for people to recreate and just you know
10 be proud of what we create in the Bronx, right. Hip
11 hop, salsa, you know we just have so much that we do
12 here. And so, to turn this into a question, you know
13 I've been looking through the cultural plan released
14 in 2017, updated in 2019 and just wondering if you
15 can provide an update on the many initiatives in
16 there right. There's such a strong focus on equity
17 in that plan, I think it's a really good compass for
18 the department but also more broadly for the city
19 about how we fund and think about arts and culture in
20 the city and could you give us an update on
21 implementation of those initiatives named in there?

22 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you so much Council Member
23 Sanchez and thank you so much for the congratulatory
24 shoutout. I appreciate it. Let me just you know
25 back up and say you know from the time that I stepped

2 into this position, it has been really challenging to
3 hear about a lot of the public safety issues that the
4 Bronx has been experiencing and I know through many
5 of the programs that we have and the research that
6 we're doing, we know the power of the arts in terms
7 of turning around communities and creating safe
8 environments through the arts.

9 Thriving artist and cultural communities, it has
10 been proven, reduces issues, violence in our
11 neighborhoods and communities throughout. So, I
12 share your concern and I share your vision and your
13 dream for your community. It's how do we take the
14 local arts and culture that we experience and live
15 every day and have it supported.

16 So, I seriously mean, you know in terms of what I
17 say, in terms of the partnership with my colleagues,
18 in the Bronx and making sure that we bring those
19 resources to your communities. And we will make sure
20 that I come out there for a tour and see the
21 communities and the organizations and the dreams and
22 visions that you have for your community.

23 I also want to stress, the programs that you're
24 talking about, the cultural development fund is the
25 most effective way that you can bring resources right

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2 to your community. Making sure that you recommend
3 panelists from your community that can speak to the
4 cultural vibrancy of the Bronx in a way that nobody
5 else can during that panel is critical. In the
6 blueprint, that was one of the main goals but also, a
7 program that we've created is to how to help
8 organizations on the ground, move into the capital
9 construction process.

10 For many of our organizations that don't have big
11 time donors or accountants or engineers or architects
12 on our boards, we need that help. So, this is an
13 incredible opportunity for smaller, not-for-profit
14 organizations who want to take their vision to the
15 next level. Who want to have a new permanent home.
16 Who want to undergo the opportunity to have a capital
17 equipment process happen in their community. So, we
18 want your recommendations in terms of who those
19 organizations should be, but there's also on your
20 side so much power to expand the Theaters of Color
21 initiative that Council Member Barron spoke about.
22 The Cultural Immigration Fund that Council Member
23 Jimmy Van Bramer and many others had funded. The art
24 is a Catalyst for Change, which is an initiative that
25 I funded, in order to make sure that we bring arts

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2 and culture to those communities that are most
3 impacted by gun violence.

4 So, I created that particular initiative because
5 I share the same concerns that you do for your
6 community and the same visions in that, we want to
7 make sure that arts and culture are the solution and
8 the tool kit to creating safer and more vibrant
9 communities.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you so much
11 Commissioner and I look forward to that. We have a
12 huge and beautiful empty historic theater called the
13 Loews Theater and I'd love to walk that with you and
14 just talk about ideas.

15 LAURIE CUMBO: You got it. I'm going to be right
16 there to check it out with an appetite and all of
17 that, so I look forward to it.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Excellent, thank you so
19 much and thank you Chairs.

20 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member
22 Sanchez and Council Member Narcisse has her hand up.
23 Everyone again, we are wrapping up DCLA. If you have
24 not asked questions and you have them, raise your
25

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2 hand now please. We'll turn to Council Member
3 Narcisse.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Hi, I just want to say
6 congratulations.

7 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: We're both in the
9 position as a Commissioner and as well as engagement.
10 I am so proud of you.

11 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you. We talked about this.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And you know Brooklyn
13 is the center of cultural and art.

14 LAURIE CUMBO: I can't say that anymore.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I'm going to use the
16 averages.

17 I'm waiting for you for a Bowl Hall, I hope
18 you're coming because -

19 LAURIE CUMBO: Dinowitz and Sanchez are still on
20 the call. I can't say that anymore.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Culture, culture,
22 culture. Yeah, I love my Bronx folks. They know
23 that but Brooklyn is the center of art and culture,
24 so I'm looking more for the part yes, yes.

25

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2 LAURIE CUMBO: I hear you. I hear what you're
3 saying.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: We love to have fun in
5 Brooklyn and I don't, I mean I was going to ask you
6 some question but I heard them before, but one of the
7 things that I'm looking forward and I know you have
8 it in your notes, in your calendar and your book and
9 your mind is WMBE. I know I don't have to ask you.
10 As a business woman, you know that. We're pushing
11 for that for creating opportunity because we need
12 that more than ever you know.

13 Post this pandemic, we need to bring the equity
14 to the communities and the best way to do it, is
15 through art. And I'm looking, I'm living it, to know
16 that you in that position, to make sure our kids in
17 the classroom, every school building to have funding
18 because once you have culture, you know what happens
19 next.

20 I don't even have to tell you because most the
21 things that I would ask you, we'd be talking about.

22 LAURIE CUMBO: That's right.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: So, just make it
24 happen. Make it happen. Make it happen. Bring the
25 equity to all the aspects. So, that's all I can say.

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2 I'm just going to leave it alone because you know how
3 we think, how we've been talking about how important
4 it is to include to be very inclusive and let's
5 continue being inclusive but address the inequities
6 that we have in our communities, so thank you.
7 Congratulations. Let's get the work done.

8 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you so much. Thank you and
9 so much of what you said is what we talked about when
10 we had lunch that day. So, I really appreciate your
11 enthusiasm and celebratory comments. It feels
12 awesome. I want you to know within this agency, we
13 are doing a real deep dive in terms of our diversity,
14 equity inclusion. So, as the Department of Cultural
15 Affairs, we want to be the model in terms of
16 diversity, equity inclusion but we also have a very
17 robust procurement department here in the Department
18 of Cultural Affairs. We want to make sure that
19 diversity and a reflection of the City of New York is
20 reflected in all things that we do as it pertains to
21 procurement. We want to make sure that anytime we
22 bid a project out that we make an intentionality
23 about making sure that MWBE's are at the top of our
24 priorities and our goals. So, just like you said,
25 I'm going to do it. We're going to continue to work.

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2 We're going to continue to make sure that this is one
3 of the most robust and model agencies in the City of
4 New York because we have to be. We represent the
5 entire City of New York. We are the Department of
6 Cultural Affairs and we want to see the diversity of
7 the City of New York reflected in all that we do, And
8 I will see you soon.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member
10 Narcisse and I will now turn it back to Chairs
11 Brannan and Ossé for their closing comments.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you to all of my
13 colleagues. Thank you Commissioner Cumbo on your
14 first Executive Budget hearing in your respective
15 role. I hope it's not too tough on you but listen up
16 colleagues, we have a mission. I'm going to be
17 annoying you often within these couple of weeks, so
18 that we can champion all of our cultural
19 organizations and institutions. I know I'm sounding
20 like a broken record but it's not just about you the
21 glitz and glam in art and performance that culture
22 provides our city. It's the economic output that it
23 provides our city. It's the mental healthcare that
24 provides our city, so please, this is not — you know
25 I know government can be Black and White sometimes in

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2 terms of how it looks at things but this world is a
3 world of technicolor and that's because of art and
4 culture. This is the cultural capital of the world.
5 All of our five boroughs have proven that to be true.
6 Let's not give up on them now. They need our money,
7 they need our support, they need our advocacy.
8 Please, please, please push, uplift and fund our
9 cultural organizations because God knows that they
10 need it and thank you Commissioner again for being on
11 this hearing, as well as Committee Council for all of
12 your great work that you've been doing to allow for
13 us to have this space to share our views and question
14 DCLA.

15 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you. Thank you so much.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Department of Cumbo
17 Affairs, we appreciate you. Thank you so much. We
18 look forward to working with you and we're excited to
19 have a former colleague on the other side. And
20 echoing everything that Chair Ossé said. This is
21 what makes New York, New York. You can go wherever
22 you want but New York City is New York City because
23 of our culture and that's why it's so, so important
24 and that's why it needs to be seen as essential and
25 not extra.

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2 LAURIE CUMBO: That's right.

3 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And so, we look forward to
4 working with you and thank you so much.

5 LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you so much and I want to
6 thank my team. Come on team. Yeah! Thank you so
7 much. This was awesome. I see you Arie, I thank
8 everyone for being here today and it was an honor to
9 return back. I'll talk to all off line about how you
10 beat me up on this hearing and I will see you all
11 soon. Thank you so much. It's an honor to serve you
12 and to serve in this position. Thank you again.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you Commissioner.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright everyone, please bear
15 with us, we are transitioning from DCLA to Parks and
16 Rec. We just need to make sure that we have full
17 Admin on. The Sergeants will do sound checks.
18 Everyone from Parks and Rec, just be aware you are
19 able to mute and unmute yourselves and we'll just go
20 ahead and go through everyone to make sure audio is
21 working.

22 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Okay, good afternoon to the
23 members of Parks Commission. I will send some unmute
24 requests to test your audios, so please bear with me
25 and watch out for the request.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Oh, you won't need to, they
3 can unmute themselves.

4 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Oh, perfect.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yeah.

6 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Okay. Can we test your
7 audio.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Oh good, we can hear you.

9 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Sue is here, yeah.

10 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Picking you up loud and
11 clear, thank you.

12 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Great.

13 MARK FOCHT: Commissioner Focht.

14 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Okay Commissioner, we're
15 picking you up loud and clear, thank you.

16 JOY WANG: Commissioner Wang is here.

17 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Okay, we hear you loud and
18 clear. Thank you.

19 MARGARET NELSON: Commissioner Nelson is here.

20 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Thank you Commissioner,
21 picking you up loud and clear.

22 DAVID CERRON: Commissioner Cerron.

23 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Thank you sir, picking you up
24 loud and clear.

25

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2 MATT DRURY: Matt Drury, Director of Government
3 Relations. Check one, two.

4 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Thank you sir, we hear you
5 loud and clear.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Quick question Matt. Am I
7 swearing you in? Will you be possibly answering
8 questions?

9 MATT DRURY: It's conceivable.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, I'll add you to the
11 list just to - alright, thank you.

12 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Commissioner Greenfeld's
13 here.

14 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Thank you, we're picking you
15 up loud and clear.

16 VINCENT CIRRITO: Hi Assistant Commissioner
17 Cirrito is here.

18 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Thank you sir, picking you up
19 loud and clear.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, I think that was - oh,
21 First Deputy Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa? You should
22 be able to -

23 IRIS RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: Yes, I was able to, yes.
24 Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, First Deputy Commissioner.
25 Thank you.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

3 SERGEANT LEONARDO: We hear you loud and clear.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair Krishnan, Chair

5 Brannan, are you both ready?

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I'm good.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I'm good. Hi everyone.

8 Hi Commissioner Donoghue.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, so for this portion, we
10 have Council Members Brannan, Krishnan, Barron,
11 Brewer, Dinowitz, Farias, Hudson, Joseph, Louis,
12 Narcisse, Ossé, Salamanca, Sanchez, Ung, Velázquez,
13 Yeger, Ayala, Brooks-Powers, and Powers.

14 Uhm, we're behind schedule, so, we're going to
15 get moving. Chair Brannan will do his opening, then
16 Chair Krishnan, then we'll swear in the
17 Administration and then we'll get the show on the
18 road.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you Malcom. Good
20 afternoon everyone that's joining us. We are now in
21 the third and final portion of our sixth day of
22 Executive Budget hearings. I'm joined by Council
23 Member Shekar Krishnan, who is the Chair of the
24 Committee on Parks and Recreation and I want to

25

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2 welcome Commissioner Donoghue and her team to the
3 hearing today.

4 Parks Departments projected Fiscal '23 budget of
5 \$601.4 million represents less than one percent of
6 the city's proposed FY23 budget in the Executive
7 Plan. The Parks Departments Fiscal '23 Budget
8 increased by \$7.9 percent from the Preliminary Plan.
9 The increase is the result of a number of actions
10 taken, most significant of which are \$40.6 million
11 for the Parks Improvement Plan and nearly \$1 million
12 associated with fuel costs.

13 There's a lot to get through today and this is a
14 very important hearing. So, I just want to preface
15 my questions as Chair. We'll be focused on ARPA
16 funding, the Council's Preliminary Budget response,
17 the Capital Commitment Plan as well as staffing and
18 vacancies and the Tree Response System, if there's
19 time.

20 I want to give special thanks to Chima Obichere
21 for his hard work in preparation the last couple of
22 months, especially for today's hearing, John Yedin on
23 my staff, as well as all the Finance staff behind the
24 scenes who put a lot of work into these hearings.

25 So, moving right along, I will now turn it over for

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2 his opening remarks, my Co-Chair Council Member
3 Krishnan.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Chair
5 Brannan. Good afternoon everyone. My name is Shekar
6 Krishnan. I am the Chair of the Committee on Parks
7 and Recreation in the New York City Council and I
8 want to begin by thanking my Co-Chair Council Member
9 Justin Brannan and the members of the Committee on
10 Finance and the Committee on Parks and Recreation for
11 holding this virtual hearing today.

12 I'd also like to welcome all of our Parks
13 advocates and supporters who are watching today's
14 livestream. A reminder that members of the public
15 are invited to testify on Wednesday May 25th. And
16 you may visit council.nyc.gov to learn more and
17 register to speak at that hearing if you would like
18 to do so.

19 Welcome back to Commissioner Donoghue, it's good
20 to see you again and everyone from the Parks
21 Department. Our work continues to make the city's
22 parks the best in the country and ensuring that park
23 services are high quality for all communities of our
24 city. When we think about parks as essential green
25 spaces, when we think about their importance to all

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2 neighborhoods in our city, especially as we saw at
3 the last hearing, communities that have had some of
4 the least amount of access to green space, those hit
5 hardest by the pandemic, we know that a crucial part
6 of maintaining our parks and taking care of them and
7 expanding green space throughout our city is to make
8 sure that we have a budget that reflects the great
9 needs of our city's park system.

10 The Department of Parks and Recreations Fiscal
11 '23 Executive Budget totals approximately \$601
12 million, which represents a \$19 million decrease when
13 compared to the FY22 adopted budget amount of \$620
14 million.

15 We have seen over the years in decades, the
16 steady decline in Parks investment by our city and
17 how at some points where our city was at its greatest
18 fiscal crisis, like in the 1970's, the Parks Budget
19 is higher than what it was higher than what it is
20 today. And of course, with that background we know
21 that this total amount for FY23 still represents less
22 than one percent or \$1 billion of the city's
23 Executive Budget of \$99.7 billion.

24 Once again, it is still significantly less than
25 where we need to be and where the call has been for

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2 one percent or \$1 billion for Parks. So, there is
3 much work still to be done.

4 The FY23 Executive Plan includes new needs of
5 \$40.6 million and other adjustments of \$3.1 million
6 in FY23. And it does not propose any new saving for
7 the Department of Parks in Fiscal 2023. Parks FY23
8 Executive Capital Commitment Plan totals \$4.4 billion
9 in Fiscal Years '22-'26, with \$816 million in FY23.

10 The Departments Commitment plan represents
11 approximately \$4.6 percent of the city's \$94.9
12 billion capital budget for 2022-2026 and reflects a
13 decrease of \$1.5 billion or 25.4 percent from the
14 \$5.9 billion scheduled in the Preliminary Commitment
15 Plan.

16 Unfortunately, the Fiscal '23 Executive Plan does
17 not directly address or respond to many of the
18 priorities the Council included in our Preliminary
19 Budget response. Despite the Executive Budget's
20 inclusion of \$41.4 million, as a result of the
21 Council's call to include and baseline \$52 million in
22 the Executive Budget for Parks maintenance and summer
23 workforce. Other one shot items funded in the Fiscal
24 Year '22 adopted budget still remain missing from the
25 executive budget. These include \$10 million for 150

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2 maintenance workers, \$4.1 million for 50 urban park
3 rangers, \$6 million for 80 park enforcement patrol
4 officers, \$3.4 million for 15 green thumb staff and
5 materials for community gardeners, \$4.5 million for
6 our national forest and trails and \$2 million for
7 tree stump removal. Which is roughly \$30 million in
8 Play Fair or Parks Equity funding that is absent.

9 A key piece, as we've just heard, is that these
10 streams of funding that are absent from the budget
11 are one's that are supporting our frontline Parks
12 staff. Who are doing the work every single day to
13 maintain parks throughout our city. We are extremely
14 grateful for their service and we are concerned by
15 the fact that these workers are not being supported
16 in the executive budget.

17 This is as much an issue of parks, climate and
18 public health as it is worker justice. We need to
19 ensure our top priority is to ensure that our parks
20 workers are protected. That their jobs are secure.
21 That is the least that we can do to extend our
22 gratitude for the work they are doing every single
23 day to take care of our city's parks.

24 As always, the Council will make every effort to
25 include this funding at adoption. However, it is

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2 crucial for all to understand that no matter how much
3 funding is included in the Parks budget, it will
4 never be enough if we do not do our part to clean up
5 after ourselves and to respect our public spaces.

6 So, to that end, we know that we go through this
7 past year and owe a huge dept of gratitude to all of
8 our dedicated volunteers and New Yorkers who do their
9 part every single day to take care of our parks
10 system. Parks are essential spaces in our city.
11 They remain crucial to getting New Yorkers through
12 the pandemic and are key to our city's recovery.
13 Especially as we take steps towards some degree of
14 normalcy.

15 They are restorative spaces. Restorative for our
16 minds and our bodies. They are crucial for our
17 mental health and our wellbeing. We need to keep in
18 mind the importance of our green spaces and all the
19 great benefits our parks provide us with. And that
20 is why I hope we will be able to restore, baseline
21 and expand the essential funding or the Department of
22 Parks, essential, necessary and urgent.

23 I'd like to thank very much our Parks Committee
24 team Chima, Chris, Patrick, Walter. To my own staff,
25 Greg and Chuck Park for their efforts in preparing

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2 for today's hearing. I want to thank you all so much
3 from the Parks Committee, my colleagues as well in
4 the Parks Committee and my office as well for all
5 your work in preparing us for the hearing and I will
6 now pass it back to the Finance Council to continue
7 our hearing. Thank you very much.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chairs Brannan and
9 Krishnan. We've also been joined by Council Members
10 Holden and Restler. So, the following members of the
11 Administration are here to testify and/or answer
12 questions: Susan Donoghue, New York City Parks
13 Commissioner; Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, First Deputy
14 Commissioner; Vincent Cirrito, Assistant
15 Commissioner; Mark Focht, Deputy Commissioner;
16 Margaret Nelson, Deputy Commissioner; Joy Wang,
17 Deputy Commissioner; Jennifer Greenfeld, Acting
18 Deputy Commissioner; David Stark Executive Financial
19 Officer; David Cerron, Assistant Commissioner and
20 Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations.

21 I will first read the oath and after, I will call
22 on each of you individually to respond. Do you
23 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing
24 but the truth before these Committees and to respond
25

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2 honestly to Council Member questions? Commissioner
3 Donoghue?

4 SUSAN DONOGHUE: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: First Deputy Commissioner
6 Rodriguez-Rosa?

7 IRIS RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: I do.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Assistant Commissioner
9 Cirrito?

10 VINCENT CIRRITO: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And I apologize if I'm
12 pronouncing any last names wrong, DC Focht?

13 MARK FOCHT: I do.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: DC Nelson?

15 MARGARET NELSON: I do.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: DC Wang?

17 JOY WANG: I do.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Acting DC Greenfeld?

19 JENNIFER GREENFELD: I do.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Executive Financial Officer
21 Stark.

22 DAVID STARK: I do too.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Assistant Commissioner
24 Cerron?

25 DAVID CERRON: I do.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And Director Drury?

3 MATT DRURY: I do.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Commissioner,
5 whenever you're ready.

6 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Great, thank you so much. Good
7 afternoon, City Council Finance Committee Chair
8 Brannan, City Council Parks Committee Chair Krishnan
9 and members of the Council Finance and Parks
10 Committees. I am Sue Donoghue, Commissioner of the
11 New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, and
12 I am joined here today by my fantastic senior staff.
13 Thank you for inviting us to discuss the Fiscal Year
14 2023 Executive Budget for New York City Parks.

15 I'd like to begin by outlining some key facts and
16 figures that help illustrate the scale and diversity
17 of what we do at New York City Parks. We are the
18 steward of over 30,000 acres, 14 percent of New York
19 City's land mass, including 10,000 acres of natural
20 areas.

21 We oversee nearly 4,500 individual properties,
22 ranging from parks and playgrounds to community
23 gardens and natural forests. Spring, thankfully
24 marks the beginning of prime season for our parks,
25 when temperatures begin to warm up and our city's

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2 green and open spaces truly come alive, giving New
3 Yorkers opportunities to lead happier, healthier
4 lives.

5 In the six weeks since I testified at the Park
6 Committee's Preliminary Budget Hearing, we've been
7 busy, delivering for New Yorkers and preparing for
8 our peak season. We're hosting community design
9 input meetings for upcoming park reconstructions,
10 including two of the newest Community Parks
11 Initiative projects at Detective Omar Edwards Park in
12 Harlem and Chief Dennis L. Devlin Park in the Bronx.
13 We're holding ribbon-cutting ceremonies at parks like
14 Waring Playground in the Bronx, where we completed a
15 \$3.6 million dollar renovation four months ahead of
16 schedule, and Idlewild Park in southeast Queens,
17 where we opened the brand-new \$8.1 million dollar
18 Environmental Center.

19 We also were so pleased to celebrate the 40th
20 Anniversary of our Parks Enforcement Patrol, which is
21 continuing to grow and add new officers dedicated to
22 making sure that all New Yorkers can enjoy our parks
23 safely. We're also offering incredible family-
24 friendly programming at park events like Jackie
25 Robinson Day in Harlem and our beloved Street Games

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2 event, which returned after a two-year hiatus to
3 celebrate the classic outdoor games played for
4 generations in the streets and parks of New York
5 City. And on Arbor Day in late April, we held
6 workshops, tree plantings, and fun nature-themed
7 activities to make sure that all New Yorkers
8 understand that parks and trees are the lungs of the
9 city, and it's important to preserve, restore, and
10 care for them.

11 This spirit of care and commitment to parks and
12 open space is reflected in the Mayor's Executive
13 Budget for Fiscal Year 2023, which demonstrates New
14 York City's continued commitment to building a more
15 equitable park system, under the leadership of Mayor
16 Adams and thanks to a strong partnership with all of
17 you in the City Council.

18 The Mayor's Executive Budget provides New York
19 City Parks with an operating budget of \$601.4 million
20 dollars, a \$44 million-dollar increase from the
21 Preliminary Expense budget. The Executive FY23 Ten
22 Year Capital Plan includes a total budget of \$7.7
23 billion dollars, including \$488 million in new
24 Mayoral funding for approved new capital needs. It
25 is our agency's mission to not simply maintain our

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2 city's parks and green spaces, but to truly care for
3 them equitably and keep them in a consistent state of
4 good repair across the five boroughs. The FY23
5 Executive Budget is a historic down payment on the
6 Mayor's commitment to parks, and a greener and more
7 equitable future for our park system, bringing us to
8 a staffing level where we can deliver cleaner,
9 greener and safer parks for New Yorkers in every
10 neighborhood across the city.

11 This budget provides over \$40 million dollars for
12 719 new baseline staff positions, an incredible
13 investment in our agency workforce that will help
14 transition more staff from seasonal partial-year
15 positions into year-round, trained, good careers with
16 the Parks Department, great green jobs with exciting
17 opportunities for professional development and long-
18 term career advancement. The budget will
19 significantly expand our year-round Maintenance and
20 Operations staff caring for parks, complemented by
21 the seasonal staffers that join our agency team
22 during our busiest months, and includes funding for
23 new state-of-the-art trash cans and expanded rodent
24 abatement tools.

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2 The additional funding will also allow us to
3 expand our roster of full-time specialized trades
4 people, carpenters, ironworkers and masons that will
5 help clear backlogged work orders and perform in-
6 house preventative maintenance at our comfort
7 stations and other facilities. The staff lines will
8 also include increased Recreation Center staff, to
9 allow more of our centers to expand their hours,
10 opening earlier and closing later, seven days a week,
11 as well as provide additional staff to support
12 programming and maintenance of centers throughout the
13 city. Because of this, kids will have fun and
14 healthy recreational alternatives later in the
15 evening, and adults will have better access to
16 fitness before or after work.

17 Lastly, I'm pleased to add that this budget will
18 allow us to baseline an increase for 80 new year-
19 round Parks Enforcement Patrol officers, who preserve
20 and protect our parks and public facilities, and act
21 as vital community liaisons for parkgoers. In
22 addition to these operational and staff budget
23 increases, the FY23 Executive Budget provides over
24 \$488 million dollars in new capital funding for the
25 redesign and reconstruction of our open spaces and

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2 park amenities. This includes \$47.6 million dollars
3 for greenway improvements in central Queens and along
4 Brooklyn's southwest shoreline. These projects were
5 identified by Destination: Greenways, a planning
6 study conducted in partnership between New York City
7 Parks and the New York City Department of
8 Transportation, to fill gaps in existing greenway
9 routes, with a focus on connecting communities to New
10 York City's greater park system. Greenways are
11 critical components of our city's park system, and
12 thanks to Mayor Adams, we are improving outer-borough
13 access and making the greenway experience safer and
14 more inviting for all New Yorkers.

15 This capital budget also includes \$186 million
16 dollars in new State Of Good Repair funding, doubling
17 our recurring investment for fundamental capital
18 work, and giving the agency more flexibility to
19 address serious problems with heavily used
20 infrastructure, such as pools, pavement, sidewalks,
21 synthetic turf fields and our own building roofs and
22 exteriors.

23 And lastly, the budget includes an additional
24 capital investment of \$136 million dollars for street
25 tree planting, the highest funding level for tree

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2 planting in over five years. This investment will
3 allow the agency to plant 80,000 trees on city
4 streets over the next four years and making sure that
5 every New Yorker can enjoy the benefits that trees
6 provide. The shade, the beauty, and improved air
7 quality that our street trees provide.

8 At our previous Council hearing, I noted that
9 this year is the 200th anniversary of the birth of
10 Frederick Law Olmsted, who essentially created the
11 modern discipline of landscape architecture that
12 blended function and beauty. Olmsted changed the way
13 people think about our parks and open spaces, and
14 created green sanctuaries that had profound impact on
15 the cityscape.

16 I'll close by offering an open invitation to come
17 visit our agency headquarters at the Arsenal, as we
18 are currently hosting a photo and art exhibit
19 inspired by Olmsted's influence, featuring a
20 selection of ten new and reimagined parks that
21 incorporate his design principles, including former
22 industrial sites, waterfront parks, plazas, and
23 neighborhood playgrounds.

24 We, here at the Parks Department, are proud to
25 live up to Olmsted's incredible legacy. Even as our

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2 city parks have changed and evolved over these two
3 centuries, our agency's commitment remains the same,
4 delivering democratic, accessible, incredible park
5 spaces that all New Yorkers need and that they
6 deserve.

7 Thank you for allowing me to testify before you
8 today and for your dedication to providing great
9 parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers. We look
10 forward to continuing working with the Mayor and with
11 all of you at the City Council to create a bright,
12 green future with a more equitable and innovative
13 park system. Now, my senior staff and I would be
14 happy to answer any questions that you might have.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you so much
16 Commissioner, appreciate that. Before we begin as I
17 start every hearing, we may not get to all the
18 questions today or you regrettably may not have
19 response. We don't anticipate that certainly but we
20 will send a follow-up letter for any of the
21 unanswered questions. It's important to us as we
22 negotiate the budget.

23 So, I want to jump right into the ARPA funding.
24 In March of 2021, ARPA was enacted, provided billions
25 of dollars to states and municipalities nationwide.

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2 By the formula set forth in the legislation, New York
3 City received approximately \$5.8 billion in ARPA
4 state and local funding. These funds are required to
5 be obligated by December 31st of 2024. So, a couple
6 of questions on ARPA, of the total amount allocated
7 to the city, how much has the Parks Department
8 received in its budget?

9 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Brannan and I'm
10 afraid we're starting out with a question; it is one
11 that I may need to get back to you on. I do know
12 this administration is very focused on federal
13 infrastructure money and federal funding in general
14 coming to the city. And we've been working closely
15 with OMB and a taskforce put together by the Deputy
16 Mayor and we're actively applying right now for
17 federal funding to support the parks system.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, as of right now, there
19 was no ARPA money that was allocated to parks?

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Uhm, again, that's a question
21 that I am really not sure of the answer of but I can
22 assure you that we will get back to you immediately
23 with a response on the ARPA funding.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, if you could get an
25 answer to me during this hearing, that would be great

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2 because we have lots of questions here. I mean,
3 we're interested to know of how much is budgeted, how
4 much has been spent. How much is in the current
5 fiscal year versus FY23. There's a lot of stuff
6 around ARPA.

7 So, we will move to the preliminary response. In
8 the Council's Preliminary Budget response, we called
9 on the administration to include several Council
10 priorities including permits to operate beach front
11 kiosks, \$250 million for Parks comfort stations in
12 all five boroughs. \$52 million for parks maintenance
13 and summer workforce. However the executive plan,
14 only partially recognized some of these calls. Are
15 any of these things something that you will be asking
16 the Mayor and OMB for before budget adoption?

17 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Brannan for the
18 question and we have been in close conversation
19 obviously with the administration. We believe that
20 the budget and as I stated in my testimony, is a
21 historic high for the parks department bringing us
22 you know staffing levels that we believe are going to
23 be incredibly helpful for us to do our work and
24 maintaining a cleaner and safer park system.

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2 This is, as the Mayor has stated himself, an
3 important down payment on getting to one percent for
4 parks and is a real sign of the Mayor's commitment to
5 parks and a greener and more equitable park system
6 for sure.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, funding included in
8 the FY23 Executive Budget for the Parks Maintenance
9 program, does not include the \$10 million for the 150
10 Parks Maintenance workers who are funded in the FY22
11 Adopted Budget. Can you explain why that was not
12 included in the budget?

13 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, thank you Chair Brannan for
14 the question, appreciate it. We are, as I said, we
15 are really pleased with the funding that was
16 allocated and the 719 new workers that we're able to
17 hire given the increase in the expense budget that we
18 experienced and so, we are anxious to deploy those
19 folks and really focused on year round workers that
20 can have great careers within the Parks Department
21 and you now the new funding that we now have will
22 allow us to do that transition from what has
23 historically been transitional, seasonal workers to
24 year round staffing and that's what this new
25 allocation will do for us and the 719 new workers

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2 will be additive and allow us to have you now move
3 more towards that idea of full time staffing for the
4 parks department. Good career jobs within the
5 agency. And we feel like this is absolutely an
6 important commitment on the part of the Mayor and the
7 Administration.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Will this be the most -
9 what's ever been the most workers you've had,
10 seasonal workers?

11 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Our seasonal numbers definitely
12 fluctuate but this is, we see this as a historic
13 high, the \$600 million that was added. There is no
14 doubt that last year there was a one shot increase of
15 federal funding but that was just for a period of
16 time. It's no longer in the budget. This is a
17 historic high for us in terms of the expense budget.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, the Capital
19 Commitment Plan. The Parks Department Capital
20 Commitment Plan totals \$4.3 billion in Fiscal '22-
21 '26. It sounds like a lot of money but it represents
22 a decrease of 25 percent when compared to the
23 Preliminary Commitment Plan. Does this reflect a
24 realistic capital spending plan for parks?
25

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2 SUSAN DONOGHUE: A couple thing; thank you Chair
3 Brannan for the question and just to clarify, I mean
4 we do look at it in terms of a ten year plan. And
5 our ten year plan is \$7.7 billion in the ten year
6 capital plan for the Parks Department. We don't see
7 it as a decrease. There is always movement of funds
8 within that ten year capital plan that happens in
9 conjunction with OMB where funding is available when
10 the construction is going to happen and funding
11 that's more long term or projects that are more long
12 term, that funding is moved out but we do see it as a
13 \$7.7 billion capital plan which is absolutely you
14 know a realistic plan for the agency.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And how do you uhm, assess
16 the accuracy of the capital plan? Do you feel that
17 the Department has the capacity to deliver the
18 proposed level of projects?

19 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely and we are
20 constantly doing that assessment Chair Brannan. That
21 is something that we're looking at on a regular
22 basis. Our DC for capital trades Brad and the team
23 are constantly assessing looking at you know where
24 the money is. Where we are in our process and uhm,

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2 you know constantly looking at and assessing the
3 accuracy of that capital plan.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: What would you say the
5 Departments biggest capital project challenge is?

6 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Brannan for the
7 question and I think as with you know, as so many not
8 only city agency or public entities are seeing but
9 you know across the city is hiring qualified staff.

10 You now given the market challenges out there and
11 the you know incredibly competitive job market that
12 there is right now that exists in the city and
13 elsewhere, that's the biggest challenge for us is
14 just hiring qualified staff.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Alright, so let's talk
16 about staffing and vacancies then. Now that you've
17 had a chance to evaluate the potential impacts of the
18 vacancy reduction of 250 positions that were
19 implemented in the prelim. How will the headcount
20 reduction impact the agencies performance? What is
21 the total current number of vacancies at Parks?

22 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you for the question Chair
23 Brannan, I appreciate it. I mean again, you know we
24 see it as I mentioned in my testimony, 719 new staff
25 that is coming into the agency. There's no doubt

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2 that some of that seasonal and one shot funding is
3 going away but what we have worked hard to do is make
4 certain that those staff members are – we've put into
5 our seasonal plan where we are hiring and then also,
6 these folks will have an opportunity to uhm, apply
7 for these new full time year round positions that we
8 are excited to be adding to the agency.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: What is the attrition rate
10 at the Department?

11 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Excellent question, I'm going to
12 throw that over to David Stark, our Financial
13 Officer, David.

14 DAVID STARK: Yeah, the attrition rate for parks
15 is at around five and a half percent, higher in some
16 areas than others and we still comparatively that's
17 extremely good but we still remain in a one for two
18 hiring freeze, so vacancies will continue to build.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: How many, how many staffers
20 did we lose?

21 DAVID STARK: Most of the positions that OMB
22 removed were vacant positions. So, they were
23 potential staff hires.

24
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, do we think it was a
3 good idea to eliminate vacant positions? Are we
4 going to request restoration there?

5 DAVID STARK: There are things I know and things
6 I don't know.

7 SUSAN DONOGHUE: There are - well, and that's
8 Chair Brannan where I said, I mean you know the new
9 hires that we're able to do the 719 new hires will
10 certainly go along way towards helping us replace
11 some of those positions.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: How many, I'm mean, I'm
13 trying to get to how many are going to be left over.
14 Like 719 is not the magic number, right?

15 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Right, no, absolutely. Do you
16 mean how many are left over from the seasonal
17 staffing that we had? The CCC's?

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah, yeah.

19 SUSAN DONOGHUE: So, we are - we are doing all
20 that we can to as I said, we had about 1,800 - we
21 have about 1,800 positions as part of the CCC, the
22 City Cleanup Corp. We have moved - we're in the
23 process of moving a bulk of those into our seasonal
24 positions and then again, we'll be adding full-time
25 year around positions as well.

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2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, uhm, are you confident
3 that the Parks Department will have sufficient
4 maintenance workers for this summer?

5 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, we are. With these new
6 positions and with our seasonal staffing, we will be
7 doing all we can to make sure that we are able to
8 maintain our standard that we believe is necessary
9 and appropriate across the city.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, I don't want to take
11 up too much of our time, as I want to let Councilman
12 Krishnan get some questions but I do want to address
13 you know, what I think has sadly become the butt of a
14 joke with how long it take for a lot of parks capital
15 projects to get done. I often you know, I've
16 allocated close to \$50 million just in parks and
17 playground projects in my district and there isn't a
18 shovel in the ground in a single one yet.

19 You know, I'm still cutting ribbons on projects
20 that my predecessor funded. I think we all
21 acknowledge that it's a problem. I think you know; I
22 think certainly uhm, with your predecessor, you know
23 he was one of the first to at least acknowledge that
24 it was an issue but nothing really got done as far as
25 fixing that.

2 I understand that you don't make up these prices,
3 that this is the price that comes back to bid. But
4 there's also the issue of time and how long these
5 projects take. I mean, there's playground where I
6 will literally tell a parent and I'm only half joking
7 when I say that their kid might be at Yale by the
8 time the playground is finished.

9 So, and I think all of my colleagues share this
10 frustration. Uhm, I want to believe that this is
11 going to be a focus and something we could work on
12 together and have the tough conversations about why
13 it takes so long and why it's so expensive because
14 even though parks does a great job and I don't
15 certainly blame parks workers. It's the process,
16 it's the procurement process. However, there are you
17 know I had a project out of my district where my
18 predecessor had a project done that because of the
19 way it was set up, we were able to get the SCA to do
20 the work even though it was a park and SCA got it
21 done in less than a year.

22 Parks Department, that's a dream that is an
23 inconceivable dream. So, I really would like to find
24 a way to fix that. I don't know what the answer is
25 but I think it's a conversation that uhm, it's really

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2 become a comedy at this point. And I hope that we
3 have your commitment in trying to root out why it
4 takes so long, why it's so expensive, and how we can
5 get - you know I'm telling my new colleagues that
6 some of the stuff that they fund this year or next
7 year, by the time they're done in eight years, those
8 are the projects that the way it is right now, those
9 are the projects that might be finished.

10 But the stuff that, certainly the stuff that I'm
11 funding now in my second term, there's no way I'll
12 still be in office when those things are finished.
13 It's not about me being there to take the credit but
14 it's about the life cycle of a project. So, uhm, you
15 know we hope we can work with you on this because
16 it's a real issue and I think I speak for a lot of my
17 colleagues that, the frustration is tough. It's hard
18 enough to explain to you know the average constituent
19 why they can't just have their uncle Jerry by the
20 stuff at Home Depot and do it over the weekend. It's
21 hard, it's hard when I tell someone the bathroom is
22 going to cost \$3 million. Their heads explode and I
23 can't blame them for that.

24 So, there's no real answer to it but I hope that
25 we have your commitment to try to find a way to fix

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2 this once and for all. Because that would be a big
3 legacy for your leadership here.

4 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Well, thank you Chair Brannan
5 and I want to salute your legacy and that incredible
6 support for parks and green spaces and that
7 commitment of capital dollars and those are amazing
8 enhancements to Brooklyn and to the open spaces in
9 Brooklyn and that are so appreciated.

10 I hear you. We have done a lot internally.
11 We've done an awful lot internally to address and
12 streamline the process, limit the number of reviews
13 and do everything we can internally. But as you
14 rightly said, this is not a parks department process,
15 this is a city process. And so, I'm pleased to say
16 that this Administration is incredibly focused on
17 that timeline and the challenges with that timeline.
18 There has been a capital reform taskforce that has
19 been formed by the First Deputy Mayor. And that a
20 number of both city agencies and a number of
21 important stakeholders are a part of and I have all
22 faith that it's getting the attention that it needs
23 and it will help all of us in terms of speeding up
24 that capital process. There is no doubt that the
25 School Construction Authority can do things quicker.

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2 I know it well. I worked with them closely in my
3 last ten year here at the Parks Department. They're
4 public authority, operate under different rules and
5 as I said, the city - it's a city process. The
6 School Construction Authority is outside of that
7 process. We're well aware of the delays. We are
8 very anxious to work within this capital reform
9 taskforce. I've got two of my best people on it from
10 their capital division and we're very much committed
11 to improving the process too. No one likes delays.
12 We are so focused on making these spaces available
13 for all New Yorkers. We know how important they are
14 and we're doing everything we can. And you have my
15 commitment that we will continue to do everything we
16 can to improve the process.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I appreciate that
18 Commissioner. Thank you so much. I'm going to turn
19 it over to Chairman Krishnan. Thank you.

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Chair
22 Brannan for your questions. Thank you for joining us
23 again Commissioner Donoghue. I've got some questions
24 myself too and you know just as a general matter, as
25 we get closer to negotiating the administration, this

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2 administrations first budget, I do hope the budget we
3 adopt will reflect our joint and shared vision on
4 improving the departments operations, especially on
5 New York City parks maintenance and expanding park
6 access and equity across our city.

7 So, let's take a look at what that means more
8 concretely. The Department of Parks Recreation
9 Fiscal 2023 Executive Budget, as Chair Brannan
10 indicated totals \$601 million. So, just as a general
11 matter, what are the department's budget priorities
12 and how doe this budget support the urgent needs on
13 the ground such as over, increased overall condition
14 and cleanliness acceptability ratings for smaller
15 parks and improved timelines for the capital project
16 commitments that we just talked about. How will this
17 budget – what are the priorities of the Parks
18 Department with this budget and how are they advanced
19 by what the budget is?

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan for the
21 question and for all of the support for our parks and
22 open spaces. It's greatly appreciated. This budget
23 is a historic high for the Parks Department. How
24 will our priorities are really three fold. Clean and
25 safe parks for all New Yorkers. We care deeply about

2 how they're maintained. It leads into the second
3 major priority which is equity. We want to make sure
4 that all of our park spaces are maintained equitably.
5 That all New Yorkers have access to good green, open
6 spaces. We know how critical they are to New Yorkers
7 across the city and this budget helps us to address
8 that and thirdly, it's about nature and the
9 environment. I mean, we're very focused, we take it
10 very seriously, that 30,000 acres of park land. It's
11 so critical, the health and wellbeing of those 30,000
12 acres, especially those 10,000 natural areas are so
13 critical to health and wellbeing of the city as a
14 whole and so, this budget does address those
15 priorities. The funding that we've received is
16 directly aligned to clean and safe, to equitable
17 access, to expanding our hours at our rec centers and
18 uhm, and as I said, we are also very focused on you
19 know the capital reform process and that taskforce.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And so, knowing that,
21 let's focus on the heart of the matter, which we've
22 you know, I've been advocating strongly around for
23 months now as so many others have been advocating for
24 parks throughout the city. My colleagues have as
25 well. Since I took office, I've advocated strongly

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2 to expand the parks budget to \$1 billion annually,
3 joined by so many other parks and equity advocates
4 across the city.

5 And while this budget may be a historic high at
6 this point, the fact of the matter is, New York City
7 despite you know our claims to being the greatest
8 city, the biggest city in this country, the fact of
9 the matter is so many other cities devote far more of
10 their budget towards parks. More than one percent
11 and New York City in the past as we went through in
12 our last hearing as well, there were times in the
13 last five decades where the city invested more in our
14 parks than they have now. So, from a historic
15 standpoint, we're falling short of where we need to
16 be to take care of our park spaces and I'm sure the
17 Department, the Parks Department appreciates that
18 too. Because that is a direct impact on the work
19 that you are all able to do, to take care of our
20 spaces and to expand them.

21 In our budget hearings, we've talked through the
22 fact that the Mayor has explicitly committed, as a
23 campaign promise to one percent or \$1 billion for
24 parks. And you know I understand the language about
25 down payments and things like that but the fact of

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2 the matter is, a commitment is a commitment and we
3 expect this administration to honor that stated
4 commitment. And I know there have been conversations
5 that you and the Mayor have had as you've testified
6 in the past as well, that there have been
7 conversations with the Mayor and OMB as you've
8 testified in the past as well. But here we are at
9 this point in the budget season and the budget is
10 still \$400 million short of the \$1 billion that so
11 many have fought for and asked for in this Council
12 and in the city.

13 So, I'd love to get an update from you as to how
14 the conversations with the Administration are going
15 on expanding funding for neighborhood parks. Should
16 we expect any changes as we enter into budget
17 negotiations? And if not, has the administration
18 given any reason why they feel this current funding
19 level is adequate? We're far short of where we need
20 to be and I personally would love to hear if we can
21 get there. What is the path to getting there? And
22 why this commitment has still not been honored?

23 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan for the
24 question and also again, for all of your advocacy and

25

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2 support and recognition of the importance of parks
3 and open space.

4 As I've stated in the past, this is an
5 administration that is keenly focused on the
6 importance of parks and open space and is very
7 dedicated to the Parks Department and the Parks
8 Department Budget. This is for us a historic high at
9 Parks and the conversations have been around really
10 transitioning from a seasonal, traditional workforce
11 to a full-time year around positions that can grow
12 with parks, that can create great career
13 opportunities and good green jobs and that's what
14 we're doing with this budget.

15 As the Mayor has said publicly, this is a down
16 payment on that commitment to parks and to our parks
17 system and it is an ongoing conversation but we are
18 certain of this administrations commitment to green
19 and open space and has shown it with this budget.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And can we expect as we
21 enter into budget negotiations, that there will be
22 any change or updates to ensure that we're on track
23 for one percent. Because you know in my mind, when
24 we talked about this as a down payment, there's
25 typically an end goal and there's a timeline to get

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2 there. And I think we need to start turning the
3 abstract commitments into realities and to really
4 bring our Parks Department the funding that its
5 needed for decades but especially more so now than
6 ever, needs coming out of this pandemic.

7 And so, what I'd like to know is there going to
8 be - can we expect from this Administration a clear
9 layout of whether one percent when and whether?

10 Because I do expect that it will be achieved because
11 it is a stated commitment and we have to honor our
12 commitments when it will be achieved and the path to
13 getting there.

14 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan for the
15 question and I do think that this budget shows that
16 the advocacy has been heard and that there is a
17 realization of the importance of getting to that
18 number and the Mayor's commitment and stating that
19 this is - showing this as a down payment or stating
20 this in terms of a down payment. We are still you
21 know; the city is still coming out of COVID and
22 recovery and you know there's many different
23 priorities but we see this additional funding as a
24 clear commitment that the Mayor and the

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2 Administration has made to that investment, and that
3 route towards one percent for parks.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Well, I just want to
5 reiterate that we are laser and I'm certainly and so
6 are all the advocates have been very clear for so
7 long about it too, we are laser focused on this as
8 the golf post that has been set and that has been
9 committed to and so, we expect to see more tangible
10 concrete honoring of that commitment and what that
11 will look like because we are significantly short now
12 and again, it's not where we've been historically as
13 a city. It's not where - when we stack up with other
14 cities and their budgets towards parks, we fall uh
15 far short.

16 And so, uhm, look forward to seeing a more
17 tangible concrete accumulation of that commitment.

18 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Understood, yup.

19 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Uhm, the next point was on
20 the federal funding for the COVID response and
21 recovery. You know, I think we've seen that in the
22 FY22 budget. We recognize additional federal funding
23 of \$65 million. Of which the majority was for COVID
24 response and recovery. However, federal funding in
25 this budget is less than \$3 million at the moment and

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2 so, I'd love to hear a bit about what's been the role
3 of the Parks Department in terms of the response and
4 the recovery from the pandemic. Do you feel you have
5 sufficient, available resources in this budget to
6 pursue your recovery efforts and is there any
7 additional federal funding available for the parks to
8 apply for?

9 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan for the
10 question and I appreciate it and so, I want to first
11 start off by saying that the Parks Department did
12 play an incredibly important role and continues to
13 play an important role in the city's recovery from
14 COVID. And I am so proud of my team here and the
15 staff here at the Parks Department who are out there
16 every day, making sure that our parks were clean and
17 safe through very challenging times. Not only our
18 workers out there in our parks, but in our rec
19 centers. We were food distribution sites. We were
20 testing sites. We provided so much value to so many
21 to help New Yorkers get through this crisis and I'm
22 so proud of the team for all the work they did. In
23 addition to providing outdoor classrooms and places
24 to go have your music lessons and it's played such a
25 critical role in the recovery.

2 As far as the funding and I want to circle back
3 because it's relevant to Chair Brannan's question at
4 the beginning. I wasn't - I apologize getting the
5 AARP funding. That was actually the City Cleanup
6 Corp funding and I want to clarify that obviously we
7 did - we were beneficiaries of that. So, the COVID
8 relief funding that went to parks really was that
9 CCC, that community - that Clean Corp funding, the
10 \$70 million. It was one shot federal funding that
11 went into our budget. We were pleased to have it.
12 Certainly great to be able to add additional workers
13 at that time. But just to circle back, so to Chair
14 Brannan's question, that AARP money, we did receive
15 it as the Clean Corp money and then that is just one
16 shot funding. It is not funding that is going to be
17 repeated at this time. And uh, there was just one
18 more thing.

19 Oh, in terms of additional federal funding, as I
20 mentioned earlier, we are very focused both as an
21 agency and as a city in the Administration on
22 applying for additional federal funding. There is a
23 taskforce that the Deputy Mayor, our Deputy Mayor has
24 assembled and we are laser focused on applying for
25 federal infrastructure money. And actually did just

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2 complete and submit a raise grant for additional
3 federal infrastructure money and we plan to continue
4 to apply for, to seek out research and apply for
5 federal money.

6 We know that there is money out there that is
7 relevant for us that we can apply for and that we'll
8 certainly be doing.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you and you
10 mentioned you know and we'll get back to the City
11 Cleanup Corp program and I mentioned that. But it
12 ties into a larger point, which goes next to the
13 question I'd like to ask about and that's about the
14 one shot funding for parks maintenance staff that was
15 collectively part of the Play Fair Funding overall.

16 You know, in addition to the - there are two
17 issues I think that you know I'd like to keep driving
18 home with this hearing. One is one percent of \$1
19 billion for parks and how essential that is for parks
20 equity in our city. And two, this is not just a
21 public health issue or a climate issue or a green
22 space issue, it's a worker issue. There are so many
23 workers right now and you know I see the gains made
24 in our executive budget. The conversation of part
25 time lines to full time lines and that increase is

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2 noticed and it's a good increase and a good step
3 forward but there is much more to go. There are
4 still workers right now who are afraid of what will
5 happen to their jobs come July 1st who maintain our
6 parks. I know this because I hear from them and they
7 reach out to me. They've written letters, I've
8 spoken to them and they are just as strong advocates
9 as everyone else for our parks system on top of their
10 daily work every day to clean our parks. And right
11 now in this budget, there's the Council. We've
12 advocated for \$10 million in funds for parks workers
13 to sustain these jobs. That includes \$5 million in
14 federal stimulus funding to support 150 maintenance
15 workers.

16 And so, that \$10 million overall is missing from
17 the City Budget which is of grave concern because
18 that's 150 maintenance workers, community gardeners,
19 city parks workers, that take care of as you know
20 well, all parks across our city.

21 So, first, I'd like to ask, can you please help
22 the Committee understand the importance of these
23 workers, the Parks maintenance in our city? And why
24 this funding was not baselined in the FY23 Executive
25 Budget?

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2 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan for the
3 question and there is no doubt that these workers are
4 incredibly important to the functioning and the
5 efforts of the agency. You're absolutely right,
6 they're out there, they're helping to keep our parks
7 clean and safe, which as I said at the beginning of
8 my testimony, it's an incredibly important priority
9 for the agency for me personally and for the agency.
10 We are an agency that cares a great deal about our
11 workforce and have worked hard to make sure of that.
12 And it's one of the reasons why you know one of the
13 things that we are activity advocating for and that
14 you see in this executive budget is a commitment to a
15 year round workforce.

16 We have as an agency historically had you know
17 seasonal, transitional workforce by moving to full-
18 time and funding full time year round positions.
19 It's a commitment to careers, good careers, good
20 paying jobs at the Parks Department. With that said,
21 we are an agency that has always and will continue to
22 need a certain number of seasonal workers just the
23 nature of our work and what we do. I said in my
24 testimony, it's spring time, it is pool and beach
25 season. We have to by necessity staff up that will

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2 continue to be a factor in how we operate the agency.

3 How we conduct the agency and we have consistently
4 had people coming in as seasonal workers and that
5 cycle in and out just because of the nature of our
6 work.

7 But I would say that you know by and large, what
8 we have really advocated for what this budget shows
9 is a commitment to really growing that base of full
10 time career parks employees, it's a great job. It's
11 a really important job for the city and we're really
12 looking to build that workforce.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And so, how come the
14 funding wasn't baselined though in the executive
15 budget right. I mean, this is such an important
16 critical workforce. It seems that one of the first
17 things that the city would baseline, or the
18 administration would baseline at the beginning of
19 negotiations.

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Absolutely and we do see this as
21 an important you know as an important uhm, workforce
22 for us for sure. They did baseline an awful lot of
23 positions with the increases to the budget with this
24 historic high budget and uhm, did make a significant
25 commitment to parks workers.

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2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And what do you anticipate
3 the future of the 150 maintenance workers will be
4 come July 1st if additional funding is not restored?

5 SUSAN DONOGHUE: First of all, a lot of those
6 lines are extended till September right now but what
7 we are working hard at as I said earlier is that
8 moving those individuals into our seasonal lines and
9 also, providing opportunities for those people to
10 apply for these year round positions.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And so, as of now their
12 positions would be secure in the current form till
13 September?

14 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Right.

15 CHAIRPERSON KRISNAN: And if that funding is not
16 restored and these lines aren't restored past
17 September, what would be the impact on parks
18 maintenance?

19 SUSAN DONOGHUE: As I said, we are, you know we
20 are operating now with a you know a very significant
21 seasonal plan. We're adding these additional workers
22 and we don't anticipate a negative impact, although
23 there is no doubt that those workers are important to
24 us. We have so appreciated the Council's funding and
25 we all know that you know more bodies out there, more

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2 people on the front lines helping us to clean and
3 care for our parks is vitally important. So, we
4 appreciate the Council's funding and we really look
5 forward and hope that we can continue to count on
6 that.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And if we were able to
8 secure funding to greatly expand the zone management
9 model of maintenance in addition to large parks. Are
10 there certain parks or districts where this staff
11 could be deployed more quickly? Which areas would be
12 improved based on this model of park maintenance and
13 management?

14 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thanks Council Member Krishnan
15 for the question. I am going to throw that one over
16 to our head of operations, our DC Mark Focht. Our DC
17 for Operations Mark to answer that one.

18 MARK FOCHT: Thank you Commissioner and good
19 afternoon Chair. We have rolled out zone management
20 in several parks in Brooklyn and Bronx over the last
21 several years. A park needs to be significantly
22 large enough to justify having separate zones. And
23 so, we could easily rollout zone management in larger
24 parks throughout all five acres. Excuse me,
25 throughout all five boroughs, depending on the number

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2 of staff that we would receive in order to set up the
3 program.

4 But it's a very reputable program. It can be
5 easily replicated across parks but it's really, it's
6 not for neighborhood parks because the neighborhood
7 is really, neighborhood park is really one zone. The
8 sites, we've rolled them out into is like Crotona
9 Park in the Bronx. Very large parks and you know
10 large to largest parks of which there are a select
11 number in the system.

12 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you and going over
13 to program associates now. Can you explain why all
14 eligible playgrounds are not staffed with a program
15 associate?

16 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan and I
17 think we call them playground associates and they are
18 incredible addition. They are just great staff
19 members and so important to us. And it does allow
20 for you know a great individual connection in our
21 neighborhood parks for staff with community members.
22 Part of the challenge, the challenge is really two-
23 fold. One is that in order to have a playground
24 associate in an individual playground, we need there
25 to be a facility, generally a comfort station. A

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2 place for them to leave their lunch and a place for
3 them to have a facility and not all of our – over
4 1,000 playground offer that opportunity, so it's just
5 not feasible in all of our playgrounds and plus there
6 are 1,000 of them, so it's just an awful lot of space
7 to cover. But even you know with a 1,000, it would
8 be difficult because not all of them have the
9 facilities that are required.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Hopefully we can get to a
11 place where every park has those facilities too
12 because it's a great, it's a great program. Our
13 playground associates and it would be great to see
14 all the playground benefit from it equally.

15 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yup.

16 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I want to return to the
17 subject of the City Cleanup Corp program which you
18 talked about before, which is the other facet of this
19 being a workforce and worker justice issue too and
20 that is, with the exception of 800,000 for 20
21 positions, the Fiscal 2023 Executive Plan is largely
22 missing funding for DPR City Cleanup Corp. We know
23 from prior hearings as well, that the Cleanup Corp
24 was the Parks Department was the largest beneficiary
25 in the City Cleanup Corp program.

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2 Last summer, it allowed the department to hire
3 3,500 staff and so, it would be great to hear an
4 update on the City Cleanup Corp initiative. How many
5 dedicated staff to this program are still working
6 with the Parks Department and what is the right
7 number of staff you would need to continue this
8 program? And how much would that cost?

9 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan for the
10 question. There's no doubt the City Cleanup Corp
11 effort was incredibly beneficial and I need to salute
12 my team. We were beneficiaries of it and we were
13 able to utilize it because we did a great job
14 recruiting and hiring for the program, which I'm so
15 proud of.

16 At this point, but as you know, that was one shot
17 that was COVID relief funding. It was one shot
18 federal funding that has not continued, that actually
19 ended in April. Right now, our remaining, we have
20 about 1,800 that are still in the program and those
21 individuals will be - those are the one's that we are
22 moving into or have moved into our seasonal plan and
23 individuals that we will look to provide
24 opportunities to hire on a full time basis.

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2 But we did make great use of that one shot
3 funding. We are participants in these swarms. We
4 are going out into neighborhoods with other agencies
5 and really helping to clean the city and we're proud
6 of the work that we did there for sure.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And so, is that I just
8 want to clear, is that 1,800? Because I know someone
9 in the City Cleanup Corp positions were converted
10 into and baselined as part of the original \$41
11 million, right. So, is that 800 what is left over?
12 In other words, you know come July 1st, is that the
13 number of workers that they're looking at that right
14 now are unaccounted for in the budget?

15 Or I know there's a conversion between City
16 Cleanup Corp you know part time at \$3500, what that
17 means in terms of full time positions but I'd love to
18 hear more clearly because that doesn't seem to be a
19 one to one accounting. So, there's clearly a group
20 of workers that are not accounted for yet. Is that
21 what that 1,800 is and if not, than what is that
22 number?

23 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, thank you and I may hand
24 this over to David Stark, our Executive Financial
25 Officer but part of the difference in that number is

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2 that it started at 3,500 and it isn't just
3 transitioning to other lines or seasonal lines, there
4 has been attrition. Some of the people have just
5 left on their own. There are people who have left
6 the program, left the city or no longer working for
7 us. So, some of that decrease in staffing is simply
8 attrition and they are no longer with us. And then,
9 yes, absolutely, we have moved people where we can
10 into seasonal lines. This funding ended in April and
11 so, it was right at the time where we were ramping up
12 and adding seasonal lines, so some of the individuals
13 were moved into those seasonal lines and then, as I
14 said, some we'll be looking to hire into full time
15 positions.

16 David, is there anything else I've missed? I
17 left out that you would add?

18 DAVID STARK: Sue that was a terrific and correct
19 response. Just one thing to add, none of the CCC are
20 moving automatically into the full time jobs. We'll
21 be interviewing CCC personnel as well as normal
22 seasonal employees, as well as people from our Parks
23 Opportunity program and people from the outside that
24 are applying. As this is the first change for parks
25 to open up for you know, probably in the City Park

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2 worker title, 400 new full time employees. And once
3 again, not everybody is looking for a full-time job
4 as many of our seasonals we had coming back, were 10
5 or 20 years that have other jobs during the off
6 season.

7 So, we're hopeful that we get the best
8 candidates. Everyone can apply. There will be an
9 interview process but there's no moving directly from
10 the seasonal line into a full time line without an
11 interview process.

12 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Hmm, hmm. And so, given
13 the lack - help from both of you, so thank you so
14 much for the information. But given the lack of
15 funding, really for City Cleanup Corp in the budget
16 beyond the 20 positions, come July 1st, what will
17 happen to these workers?

18 DAVID STARK: Well, on July 1st, we're hopeful
19 that minimally we can extend the vast majority
20 through September 15th, which is the end of our peak
21 season. And we'll be doing interviews during August,
22 so we'll have all the seasonals on board eligible to
23 take those positions and move directly into it with
24 no break in service.

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2 And once again, not a single CCC employee was
3 laid off during that period. Same thing with our POP
4 workers and our seasonal. We tried to continue every
5 individual by merging the funding of city funding,
6 POP funding and CCC funding. So, we totally hear
7 you. We do not want people to leave that want to
8 stay with parks but at some point, there will be a
9 limitation and some of them will have a line ending
10 in September.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And that's what I mean.
12 So, come September, so you know the building has
13 moved on but what happens in September with the
14 current budget?

15 DAVID STARK: In the current budget, we have
16 enough lines for approximately 400 city park workers.
17 Other lines, trades, are probably not applicable to
18 that group as you have to have a different type of
19 experience and uh, at that point, we do have a
20 placement program for both the CCC workers and the
21 POP workers, where we do try to do training one day a
22 week for POP workers, one day a month for the CCC.
23 We set them up with polished resume's. We try to do
24 job placements and we placed with both NYCHA. We
25 have a line to recruit there and with the Department

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2 of Education, we've been placing people in cafeteria
3 jobs and we are trying to move people into other full
4 time positions, although we would certainly embrace
5 them in the Parks Department.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, just to make sure I'm
7 clear about it to, because that means as of September
8 400 positions but 1,800 workers or you know, there's
9 what positions available at that point? But what is
10 the size of the applicant floor of the workers where
11 we would be looking for those positions?

12 DAVID STARK: My expectation is that through the
13 summer; we lose you know 100 people a month easily
14 through attrition and some people will not be looking
15 for those jobs. But I would say, you know there will
16 be a sizable number that will not be able to get a
17 full time job due to the disparate number of you know
18 people that are applying and jobs that we have.

19 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And you know I'd ask if we
20 can get that information after the hearing. So, just
21 more clearly on what the positions are exactly that
22 we're talking about. Understanding you know that
23 it's moved until September but there is that
24 difference and that's exactly the point that you know
25 I wanted to really hone in. Is that you know, we

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2 shouldn't be in this position talking about a
3 reduction in the workforce in that way. Workers have
4 been taking care of the parks for so long, through
5 the Pandemic, afterwards as well and facing this
6 shortfall between the positions that will be
7 available and the current size of the workforce. So,
8 you know I know there have been conversations and
9 things like that in terms of the different you know
10 positions with the new funding but it would be
11 helpful to know exactly what those numbers are in
12 terms of what will be available and the size of the
13 workforce that will be applying for those positions
14 but I do know that there is, I think we all recognize
15 that there is a grave disparity there. And that's
16 what we need to ensure that this final budget, as we
17 enter budget negotiations addresses. Because this
18 will have a direct impact on most importantly, most
19 urgently on workers who rely on these positions on
20 their families, their job stability. And then of
21 course, it will have a huge impact on our parks as
22 well. It just logically, we're talking about losing
23 workers at a time that we're trying to address and
24 bring more resource into our Parks Department.

25

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2 Uhm, there's a huge concern there, so you know
3 it's something that we all need to be mindful of as
4 we are focusing on our budget negotiations up ahead.

5 DAVID STARK: And the last note, that's why we
6 totally appreciate the Council's add on because those
7 150 possible lines, when they continue with the
8 people on one year lines moving to full time jobs, it
9 offers another 150 opportunities to work another full
10 year for the CCC people every six months.

11 So, that also, without your partnership, that's
12 another business.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And you know, we in the
14 Council really will keep putting forward as we have
15 put forward in our response as well, ways in which
16 the city, this administration can be supportive and
17 address some of these issues too but you know as we
18 mentioned earlier, there are things in here that have
19 not been picked up in this executive budget, got
20 crucial pieces of it.

21 So, we are putting forward the idea but we do
22 need City Hall to really make good on some of these
23 commitments to. You know one question I do want to
24 ask as far as staffing goes too is, now that we're
25 approaching pool and beach season as you mentioned

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2 Commissioner, is the Parks Department ready for pool
3 and beach season and do you guys have enough
4 staffing?

5 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member for the
6 question. Yes, we are ready. There has been you
7 know; we have a whole process leading up to pools
8 opening and a great team dedicated that is meeting
9 regularly that's getting everything ready.
10 Everything from looking at the pool tub itself to the
11 mechanicals. We have a great team at our citywide
12 services division who is so dedicated to making sure
13 those pools are operational and ready.

14 And yes, we do believe we have the headcount we
15 need to be fully functioning and managing those
16 pools.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And another, just a few
18 more questions from me that I have on a couple
19 different areas. So, one goes to our city's urban
20 forest. As we all know, the city's urban forest play
21 an essential role in the health and resiliency of our
22 city and the Parks Department, many don't know this
23 but is responsible for more than 53 percent of the
24 city's tree canopy and the urban forests are crucial
25 in that respect. It is critically important that we

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2 sustain and expand the urban forest under the Parks
3 Departments care and a budget that we adopt need to
4 reflect that to. So, I know that the Parks
5 Department agrees with the importance of maintaining
6 our tree canopy and ensuring that our urban forest is
7 well maintained but it's crucial to translate that
8 agreement into action of the budget as well. So, how
9 much funding, expense and capital is currently
10 available in the Parks Department budget in FY22 and
11 '23 for forestry and horticulture? And how much of
12 that is baselined?

13 SUSAN DONOGHUE: First off, thank you so much for
14 the question Chair Krishnan and for your appreciation
15 for your appreciation for the importance of our
16 natural areas. It is something that is so critical
17 to the Parks Department, to the health and
18 functioning of our city, reducing air pollution,
19 dealing with urban heat island affect. We care a
20 great deal about our trees and it's why I said at the
21 beginning, one of our main priorities is nature and
22 the environment here at the Parks Department. And
23 also, I have to say that's why we are so thankful for
24 the City Council's support. The Play Fair funding
25 for the forest tree management framework, it was

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2 absolutely critical to us that allowed for expanded
3 forest restorations, plantings, trail management,
4 volunteer training, natural area monitoring and it's
5 assessment. That Fair Funding has been absolutely
6 critical to us in that important work of managing our
7 forest and our natural areas.

8 In terms of the specifics, in terms of those
9 numbers, I have my Acting DC Jennifer Greenfeld on
10 the call. Jennifer, can you just give some of the
11 specifics in terms of the questions in terms of
12 budget?

13 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Yes, I'm trying locate a few
14 of those numbers. Unless David has them handy.
15 We've seen an increase in our budgets over the years,
16 so we're really thankful for that. The baseline
17 budgets - where are we? Excuse me, I don't have it
18 at my fingertips but I will have it for you in a
19 minute so I don't give you a wrong number.

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Don't worry, I can - you know,
21 in terms of the capital budget and the adds this
22 year, we did get \$136 million for tree planting,
23 which I mentioned in my testimony, which is wonderful
24 for us. It is going to allow us to plant 20,000
25 trees per year through FY26. And so, we're really,

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2 really pleased to see that. It's more money that
3 we've had for tree planting in the last four years,
4 so just a great investment in tree planting in the
5 city for sure.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And I do hope that the
7 Parks Department will also ensure that we have the
8 adequate headcount of staff really at the forest tree
9 management to ensure we can carry out the great work
10 that's needed to protect our tree canopy too and
11 that's something I hope that the Parks Department
12 will be advocating for as it comes closer to
13 adoption.

14 My final two questions and I want to turn it over
15 to my colleagues are just, you know there's been a
16 senior swim program in our city across 14 different
17 pools I believe, where seniors have had the ability
18 to swim in dedicated hours. And you know, it's
19 worked very well. It's been very successful.
20 Important for the wellbeing of our seniors as well.
21 And so, I'd like to know, it's been canceled for the
22 last two years. Has the Parks Department and will
23 the Parks Department be bringing back that program?

24 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you for the question and
25 we also agree, it is a really important program that

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2 just learn to swim in general is such an important
3 part of what we do and important aspect of our work
4 in our rec centers. So much of in terms of swimming
5 and hours is dependent on number of lifeguards and
6 that is absolutely a challenge and something that
7 we've been working very hard on in terms of light
8 broad recruitment. But in terms of what we can offer
9 in programming is often dependent on number of
10 lifeguards.

11 So, we are working really hard. We have a number
12 in training but that the senior swim program is such
13 an important one for us and something that absolutely
14 we want to try and provide. I'm going to ask DC
15 Nelson, Margaret Nelson who heads up our rec centers
16 and public programs, anything to add there Margaret?

17 MARGARET NELSON: Uhm, I would just say that you
18 know we do have indoor pools open now that are
19 providing a lot of different kinds of aquatics
20 programing. So we do have senior programming indoors
21 happening year around. But as Commissioner Donoghue
22 said, the program you're referring to, which takes
23 place outside at our pools does require a second
24 shift of lifeguards to be able to open the pool for
25 longer hours. And we are experiencing you know

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2 nationwide a lifeguard shortage. So, we're doing you
3 know everything we can to recruit and train
4 lifeguards but I think we don't know yet what that
5 will look like for the pool season.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you and I do hope
7 that we're able to restore it as quickly as possible,
8 as it is a crucial program.

9 Uhm, my final question is, can you — we have a
10 Council parks equity initiative, which is a crucial
11 piece of our Parks equity and I'd love for your
12 Commissioner to just detail the importance of the
13 Parks Equity Initiative and how whether or not it's
14 been successful and the importance of it.

15 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan and I'm
16 so happy to talk about this subject because it is
17 critical to our parks system and it is such an
18 important — the Parks Equity Initiative funds so much
19 great programming in our parks, movie nights, great
20 programs that happen across the city.

21 For me, it's an important aspect of how we can
22 expand our reach and make sure we're providing great
23 programming in parks across the city and across the
24 five boroughs.

2 It's been particularly important for our partners
3 at the City Parks Foundation, who we work closely
4 with. You know we partner with them on our
5 Partnership for Parks and it has fully supported 11
6 staff members at Partnerships for Parks who work on
7 technical assistance on the ground. They help
8 grassroots organizations with things like – with
9 tools and plants and help them to organize and find
10 their voice and develop friend groups. So, the Parks
11 Equity Initiative, I feel like is so important for us
12 just you know, putting botanicals out there, getting
13 more people involved in stewardship and care of the
14 parks system.

15 We can't do it alone. You referenced earlier,
16 the importance of volunteers. What the Parks Equity
17 Initiative does is help to fund and widen our reach
18 and really enhance stewardship, all across the five
19 boroughs in a way that we could not do on our own and
20 we're so thankful both for the support of the Council
21 and the partnership with the City Parks Foundation to
22 really ensure that partnerships for parks, those
23 teams are out there and building support and building
24 stewardship on the ground. So, it's incredibly
25 important to us.

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2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much
3 Commissioner. No further questions from me, so I'll
4 turn it back to our Committee Counsel Malcom.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Thank you Chair
6 Krishnan. We've also been joined by Council Members
7 Menin, Williams, Ariola and Lee. So, seeing some
8 coming and going, so everyone bear with me while we
9 call on for questions. So, I do not see Council
10 Member Salamanca, so we will turn to Council Member
11 Dinowitz, who was next on my list.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Wait, I'm on, I'm on.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Oh, there you are. Okay.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you.

16 Commissioner, I want to again welcome you again for
17 this position. I'm excited you know, so I've met you
18 and I look forward to working with you and I'm
19 excited for the position that our friend Iris
20 Rodriguez received.

21 So, I'm going to get straight to it. So, in
22 Fiscal Year '19, I allocated a little over \$200,000
23 for an emergency management then. This funding, even
24 though it says fiscal year '19, this funding was
25 allocated to Parks Department on July 1, 2018. It is

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2 now May of 2022 and that emergency management still
3 has not come to my Council District. I was wondering
4 if you can give me an update? And what's frustrating
5 about it Commissioner is that I believe in giving my
6 funding to parks, my capital dollars to parks,
7 schools, and affordable housing. And it's just
8 frustrating that it has taken so long to get to this
9 and I was wondering if you can provide me with an
10 update.

11 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, for sure Council Member
12 Salamanca and first off thank you so much. I'm so
13 glad to hear of those priorities of yours that parks
14 is such an important one. That means a great deal to
15 us and we so appreciate it.

16 I apologize for the frustrations. I know this
17 van is really important to you, it's really important
18 to us as the agency and I know there's been a great
19 deal of work to make it happen and bring it to
20 fruition. My understanding is it's really close to
21 being a reality. I don't want to make excuses but I
22 know COVID had impacts and further delayed things but
23 Margaret, can you say specifically in terms of
24 timing? Council Member Salamanca, I'm just throwing
25 it over to our Deputy Commissioner for Public

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2 Programs who oversees PEP and our urban park rangers,
3 Margaret.

4 MARGARET NELSON: Yes and thank you again Council
5 Member Salamanca for allocating that allocation for
6 this communication and emergency van. We are very
7 excited to have it. We share your frustration at how
8 long it's taking to move through the process. As the
9 Commissioner said, you know COVID did also delay
10 things. We are very excited that it is in the final
11 stages. It is basically mostly built. It needs to
12 be signed off by DCAS and we're hopeful that we will
13 get it sometime this summer. We don't have an exact
14 date yet but we are -

15 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Commissioner, I mean -

16 MARGARET NELSON: We're happy to report the final
17 stages of getting this vehicle.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: You have to understand
19 my frustration. I was told this last year, last
20 years budget. I mean, I've had affordable housing
21 units built much quicker. I'm talking about 3-400
22 units building, being constructed, then getting a
23 van. You know that you order, you get it retrofitted
24 and you get it delivered, you know and so, I
25 understand you know, I got an apology last year and I

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2 got an apology the year before that you know and it's
3 just unacceptable that we're in the Council
4 allocating capital dollars to city agencies and you
5 know we cannot use COVID as an excuse. You know it
6 is just unacceptable that this van has not been
7 delivered to my Council District.

8 So, look, I'm going to leave it at that. Just
9 know Commissioner Donoghue that in the last three
10 budget cycles, I've been brining this up and I'm
11 eager to get this van here.

12 And then finally, you know I'm a member of the
13 BNC and I know that last year we uhm, we base - well,
14 we allocated some lines for parks enforcement and
15 uhm, you know out of my discretionary money, I'm
16 allocating funding to have overtime for [INAUDIBLE
17 5:05:46] Park and Starlight Park. Because I'm just -
18 I just don't have enough man power there. Does the
19 Parks Department in this budget plan on baselining
20 these frap officers so that I no longer have to pay
21 out of discretionary funding to have adequate you
22 know, adequate presence in my Council District?

23 SUSAN DONOGHUE: First off Council Member
24 Salamanca, I appreciate your frustration. I'm sorry
25 to hear it in terms of the van. I promise we won't

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2 go through another budget cycle without having a
3 better answer for you and we will be getting back to
4 you as soon as possible on the timing of the van.

5 As far as baselining PEP officers, yes. In this
6 budget cycle, we were able to baseline an additional
7 80 PEP officers. Appreciate your support for those
8 two parks in the Bronx and we will certainly look to
9 be able to allocate those PEP officers in ways that
10 they are meeting the needs where they are on the
11 ground.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you
13 Commissioner. I look forward to working with your
14 agency. Thank you again. Thank you Mr. Chair.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member.
16 Next, we'll turn to Council Member Dinowitz.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you. Good
19 afternoon. I hate to pile on.

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Okay.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: But it's almost the
22 same issue and I'll share two, and one is the
23 sidewalks. So, we - our offices reached out about
24 the trees and sidewalk program that's supposed to fix
25 sidewalks that are damaged by roots. But we're told

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2 that there's such a backlog that things aren't being
3 addressed for three to five years. We have sidewalks
4 that are - that people, especially if you have a
5 physical limitation, a physical disability, you're
6 unable to walk on that street or it's so dangerous
7 that you might end up breaking a leg. And you will
8 then have a physical disability and not be able to go
9 on that street at all.

10 And I'm wondering if there's enough funding to
11 deal with the backlogs, that we're not waiting three
12 to five years and also, you had emailed my office
13 about the standards checklists. It evaluates the
14 combination of tree and site conditions and I'm just
15 wondering if you take into account the organizations
16 that are there like synagogues and schools and
17 community centers and churches when you determine
18 whether somebody gets a score of 80 or above?

19 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member
20 Dinowitz and a really good question and we do care a
21 great deal about you know trees and how they are
22 impacting the sidewalks and that's the reason for
23 this program that we have. I'm going to toss it over
24 to our acting deputy Commissioner Jennifer Greenfeld

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2 just to talk a little bit about the program and the
3 backlog.

4 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Sure, thank you very much
5 for that question. In terms of the rating system,
6 uhm, the system takes into account the pedestrian
7 activity on the street. It's not like whether it is
8 a church or a school. It's not the kind of you know
9 business that's there, it's just looking at what sort
10 of access, so I would say we don't preference one
11 kind of pedestrian over another. We're looking at
12 just in general pedestrian activity on that stream.
13 So, it is part of the rating.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Because if you're
15 looking at traffic.

16 JENNIFER GREENFELD: No, no pedestrian traffic,
17 yeah.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Right, that's what I
19 meant, pedestrian traffic and it's their church for
20 example, you may want to look at the pedestrian
21 traffic on a Sunday as opposed to a school where you
22 may want to look in the morning and mid afternoon
23 hours.

24 So, that's, it's unclear to me whether that's
25 taken into consideration or do you like insult

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2 another agency, but like some other agency, go at
3 weird times during the day to get traffic.

4 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Right, I mean we're going
5 when it's efficient for us to go. So, it's true, we
6 can't be there 24 hours a day but we do see what's
7 there. We look and see whether there's a school on
8 the street or a place of worship. So, we see that
9 and we know that those places are trafficked at other
10 times and we may not be there. So, we do our best to
11 anticipate the full 24 hour use of a site, not just
12 that moment that we're there. And that's definitely
13 part of the rating.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: And then the backlog,
15 three to five years?

16 JENNIFER GREENFELD: It's uhm, we're doing the
17 best we can. We did of course like all capital and
18 expense contracts had significant COVID delays and
19 we're doing a great job with the program. It's
20 really fully started up this year after a quite a bit
21 of a delay and we think we're really going to get to
22 a lot more than we have in the past.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I appreciate your
24 empathy but while you're trying hard, there are
25 people in my district how are honestly, it's a

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2 dangerous situation because it is either walking on
3 these sidewalks that are really lifted up by many
4 inches or they have to walk in traffic. And those
5 are two very bad choices, especially as we see
6 traffic fatalities increasing in our city. And
7 again, are you budgeting? Does the Executive Budget
8 have enough money to address the backlogs? And I
9 understand you use a multitude of whatever vendor is
10 available to deal with these raised sidewalks.

11 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Yeah, the Administration has
12 baselined a significant amount for trees and
13 sidewalks program and we are assessing if that will
14 take us through to you know access the real backlog.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay, so.

16 JENNIFER GREENFELD: We'll take a look at that.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: So, it sounds like a
18 maybe. I'm hoping that this is part of the budget
19 that you take care of this because this really is
20 impacting people, especially with disabilities, their
21 ability to walk safely in our city. I would just add
22 to that that the Tree Stump Removal Program, I
23 appreciate Parks is very responsive. They come and
24 do tours. I know Iris Rodriguez-Rosa has been very
25 responsive and her team. They saw a spot on Daily

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2 Avenue, we're still waiting about a year later for
3 those stumps to get removed. I'm hoping that those
4 stumps can be removed in somewhat of a timely
5 fashion. Do you have any update on the tree stumps?

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

7 JENNIFER GREENFELD: I apologize, was there a
8 question Council Member about the stumps.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I would just say, I
10 don't know what the backlog is but I think we were
11 told it would happen last fall as soon as possible.
12 I'm going to leave it there because there are a lot
13 of hands up but I do want to say that I appreciate
14 your commitment to adding trees. I noticed in the
15 testimony that Brooklyn and Queens were specifically
16 mentioned for greenways. Of course I'm a little
17 disappointed that the Bronx did not specifically
18 mention. You know we have important greenway
19 projects in the Bronx that we need taken care of and
20 I hope that in your tree program, as you are planting
21 more trees throughout the city, the Bronx isn't also
22 left behind, as we so often are.

23 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Thank you Council Member
24 Dinowitz. I didn't mean to leave out the Bronx at
25 all and we would not do that. Iris wouldn't let us

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2 do that. You know that, so I promise that is not
3 happening. The destination greenways was a specific
4 plan that we did with DOT focused on Bronx and
5 focused on Queens and Brooklyn. We're very proud of
6 Putnam Greenway that we recently redid in the Bronx
7 and working closely with DEP on the Tibbits
8 Daylighting. It's going to create a beautiful
9 greenway in the Bronx. We're really excited to move
10 forward on and then their other thing that I would
11 say as I mentioned earlier. We have applied for this
12 federal infrastructure grant that's Raise grant and
13 that involves a master plan for greenways throughout
14 the city and does focus very much on more greenways
15 for the Bronx.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Good, we'll let's talk
17 further with that at a later time. Thank you for
18 your time. Thank you Chair Krishnan and Chair
19 Brannan.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member.
21 Next, we'll turn to Council Member Holden followed by
22 Council Member Narcisse.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you Chairs and
25 Commissioner, nice to see you and Commissioner Iris

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2 Rodriguez-Rosa, a good friend from her Queens days.

3 And now, it's nice to see both of you in charge of
4 Parks and I know we have a lot of work to do. And I
5 just want to you know mention about you know I know
6 Chair Brannan covered capital spending and the time
7 it takes for completion of the construction projects.
8 However, you know the estimates we're getting are so
9 out of whack now for these projects that we need some
10 explanation and accountability. Let me just give you
11 an example. For instance Juniper Valley Park has two
12 small bathrooms and they got to renovate - you know
13 the price to renovate the two bathrooms in the park
14 house by the tennis courts, now get this, came in at
15 \$6 million, \$224,120. \$6 million to renovate two
16 bathrooms, not the building, to renovate the
17 interior.

18 So, I kind of hit the ceiling on this. I
19 mentioned to Commissioner Docket of Queens and I
20 said, you know that so out of whack that it's almost
21 comical and so, he went back and looked at it and
22 then I got another - about a week later, I got
23 another price of three million seven hundred and
24 forty thousand dollars, so quite a difference but
25 still, to me, way, way out of whack. You could build

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2 that building for half of \$3 million. Probably \$1.5
3 I would imagine and I did get prices from contractors
4 on the high side.

5 So, I know we have to reform the process. I know
6 but who's giving that additional price here? Is that
7 parks people giving us this estimate or is it
8 somebody else?

9 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member Holden
10 for the question and I agree it's frustrating and the
11 numbers are frustrating. That estimate would be
12 generally from the Parks Department, yes. There is a
13 team at Parks that does the capital estimating.
14 There's a number of different factors as you well
15 know that can be really challenging for us. In terms
16 of that estimate, it depends on what's underground.
17 We don't always know that going into a capital
18 project and some of the infrastructure underground
19 can create real challenges for us as I know sadly you
20 have experienced. But yes, that is, that estimate is
21 coming from the capital division.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So, that's where I think
23 they're throwing darts now. And wherever it hits,
24 their coming up with a price because it's so out of
25 whack. Because again, we're not talking like double,

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2 triple, we're talking eight to ten times the normal
3 price. So, I think we have to hold you know some
4 accountability and not you know there's technology
5 now that we could use to see what's underneath the
6 ground. It shouldn't be a surprise anymore with the
7 technology we do have. And that's the problem I have
8 not only with parks but many other agencies are not
9 using the technology that they can use or should use
10 so there are no surprises.

11 And these prices are so out of whack that I think
12 we need some explanation as to what is the timeline
13 for this capital reform process or committee that's
14 looking into this? And I'm going to speak to the
15 Mayor about this because not only with any parks
16 project, like what Chair Brannan said, I'm never
17 going to see these projects in my come to fruition
18 and completion to you know in my Council's run here.
19 I'm going to you know if I'm in eight years, it's
20 never going to happen and with the prices, we're
21 really scamming the uhm, you know the taxpayers.

22 Just like from the Fire Department, we got a \$1.2
23 million kitchen renovation. Parks projects put that
24 to shame. Parks Projects are so out of whack that
25 it's not based on any reality whatsoever, so I don't

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2 expect you to answer but I do think that we need a
3 real hard look at this from the parks people
4 estimating these projects. Because there is
5 technology, as Chair of Technology, the technology
6 committee for over the last four years in the
7 Council. We can see what's underground. We know how
8 much this project should be. But let's talk trees
9 for a minute because the prices of the planting of
10 trees you know are way out of whack too. Have we
11 made any progress lowering the prices of tree
12 plantings since we last spoke?

13 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, I'd like DC Greenfeld to
14 address that. She and her team have done a great
15 amount of work to look at reducing prices in the tree
16 planting effort. It is, we agree, it has gotten
17 quite costly. It's not something the we're happy
18 about either and I know her team has done a lot of
19 work in terms of looking at different types of
20 contractors. Small, large contractors, MWBE
21 contractors. I know she's done a lot of work to try
22 and improve that pricing.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And -

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

25

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Excuse me, and possibly
3 in house, which I thought that was exciting to hear
4 but I'm sorry, go ahead.

5 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Yeah, we've talked about
6 this before. Thank you so much for the question
7 Commissioner Donoghue expressed the same sentiments
8 that I feel in terms of you know we've got to find a
9 way to reduce these costs and we're seeing some good
10 signs. We had uhm, you know one of the main concerns
11 was the decrease in our vendor pool, so with little
12 competition, it's hard to get competitive prices and
13 with our new sort of varied approach to bidding out
14 large, small, short-term, long-term contracts, we did
15 see an increase of our vendor pool. It doesn't sound
16 like a lot but from 6-14 bidders overall, we have 6
17 new MWBE bidders - I mean vendors not just bidders
18 and this year and in those contracts, which are
19 relatively small, about eight percent of our
20 contracts, we did see 1,000 per tree saving on
21 average.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Oh, great.

23 JENNIFER GREENFELD: That's significant and it's
24 not yet a large piece of the budget but that's - our
25 idea is that we're going to bring in vendors, work

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2 with them and we hope that overtime it will increase
3 the percentage of contracts using those vendors who
4 are finding savings.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And what about the pilot
6 program of in-house? Actually creating a little you
7 know pilot program to plant trees and see how much it
8 would cost?

9 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Yeah, we're still looking at
10 that and in fact, one of the pieces of the program is
11 to find trees that are easier to manage and this
12 year, we did have 150 of those smaller - the trees
13 aren't really smaller but the packaging is easier to
14 move around. And we experimented with that this year
15 with in house and we actually got them to contractors
16 to see how they use them and it's going very well,
17 these grow back trees. So, we're piece by piece
18 we're putting it together. We're going in a good
19 direction.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Great, thank you Chairs.
21 Thank you Commissioners.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you and next, we'll
23 call on Council Member Narcisse followed by Council
24 Member Restler.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Good afternoon and
3 thank you Chair Krishnan and Justin and Commissioner
4 Donoghue, thank you so much. And one other thing I
5 want to say to you by observing, I love your style.
6 You are instant to answer the questions. We
7 appreciate you. We appreciate when people actually
8 can come and make it easy for us to ask the questions
9 that we need to ask because we're hired to do a job.

10 Talking about the sidewalk, that's a safety
11 issue. So, for me, I think it's really uhm,
12 inappropriate for us to leave the sidewalk like this.
13 Like we was talking about I think it was CM Dinowitz
14 that spoke about it. My district, I have so many of
15 that because post Sandy, it caused that problem for
16 us. So, a lot of trees are rooting up and uhm, and
17 they need to be done because I feel so bad. Certain
18 places, I don't even want to go because when the
19 people point it out to me, I'm embarrassed by the
20 city that we serve. So, I feel like we need to do
21 more than that and I will encourage that you look
22 into it because especially area that had problem with
23 the water.

24 And uhm, we're talking about 20,000 trees, the
25 greenways that we're going to do. So, in that, how

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2 many of them, how does it go by boroughs? How many
3 trees? If you can highlight for me because we know
4 that some area, high risk area for me, trees and
5 space in park is very important. It's a public
6 health issue.

7 So, as a nurse, I appreciate that and I would
8 like to know how many, how it goes and how the trees
9 separating from boroughs to boroughs.

10 I have a next one. The city continues to be
11 strong. We know about minority business right.
12 Minority business owned. So, what are parks doing
13 for MWBE and what's your goal and how is that going?
14 What's the progress that you make in those goals?
15 And what more can the agency do to ensure that MWBE
16 receive more opportunity in procurement and
17 concession contracts. So, after that, you can
18 answer.

19 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member
20 Narcisse and so appreciate your question and I will
21 answer each in turn. First of all, I just want to,
22 so we did get funding for tree planting, for street
23 tree planting. It's 20,000 trees a year. We will be
24 looking at and Jennifer Greenfeld, who is on the
25 line, who heads up our forestry and natural resources

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2 area, they have a very detailed system where they
3 look at where they plant. We are very focused on
4 greening in areas that are underserved. Where
5 there's not enough tree canopy.

6 So, we appreciate your interest and focus on
7 trees and it's one that we share. We know how
8 important they are and that's we are so pleased to
9 get this additional funding. I want to separate, you
10 mentioned trees and greenways, two different things.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yeah.

12 SUSAN DONOGHUE: So, the funding for green ways
13 is exactly that. To create new green ways in the
14 city. To create wonderful new roots to connect to
15 there parks. So, that create safe green roots to get
16 to parks. That's separate funding. That was \$47
17 million for green ways and then we did receive the
18 money for tree planting that will allow us to plant
19 20,000 trees and we will look to do that equitably
20 across the boroughs.

21 As far as your other question, I'm so glad you
22 asked it about MWBE. We are really, really proud as
23 an agency. We have an incredibly success record of
24 recruitment and utilization of minority and women
25 business enterprises with consistently been one of

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2 the strongest performing agencies in the city. We
3 rank second or third in the city in terms of our
4 utilization of MWBE contracts. You heard Jennifer
5 talk about it and we have looked at that as an avenue
6 to help bring our tree planting costs down and then
7 in addition, we had a big announcement this spring.
8 We announced 100 new construction projects moving
9 forward in the city across the five boroughs. Fully
10 50 percent of those 100 projects were MWBE
11 contractors. So, we have worked really hard and
12 really consistently in terms of making certain and
13 really, really having a strong commitment to MWBE.
14 It's a really important part of the work we do and
15 I'm really proud of our capital team. They've done
16 just a great job in making sure that we're utilizing
17 MWBE contractors.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And about the sidewalk,
19 that really is problematic in our community.

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yup, we absolutely agree and as
21 we said to Council Member Dinowitz, it is something
22 that you know we do have funding for. We do go out
23 and do an assessment and while we do have a backlog,
24 there's no doubt. We are you know committed to and
25 do have money in our budget and are working through a

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2 backlog to make sure that we are getting to those,
3 you know those sidewalks. We recognize that it's an
4 incredible problem and are you know, very anxious to
5 be able to address it as quickly and as efficiently
6 as we can.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I know you anticipate
9 to generate a saving of \$6.2 million right for the
10 Fiscal 2023. So, in your opinion, what action your
11 department been implementing to function effectively
12 – I mean efficiently? What program areas need
13 improvement?

14 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Uhm, so I'm actually going to
15 ask David Stark to answer that. Our Executive
16 Financial Officer.

17 DAVID STARK: I think the savings of \$6.2 were
18 for accruals, so nothing has to be reduced.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay.

20 DAVID STARK: It was accruals in our Parks
21 Opportunity program because it was a difficult time
22 to recruit during the end of COVID and now we're
23 running the numbers back up again and we had some
24 savings in our other than personal services budget
25 due to the supply chain. So, all the money is back

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2 in the budget for next year and we're very hopeful
3 that we won't have those accruals again.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay, thank you. I see
5 my colleagues have their hands up and the prices, I
6 don't know who's benefiting from - those prices are
7 too high. The bathroom, like CM Holden said, I was
8 looking at the prices for my basketball court. It's
9 too much money. Too much. Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member.
11 Next, we'll turn to Council Member Restler followed
12 by Council Member Kagan.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you Malcom and
15 thank you Chairs Brannan and Krishnan for your great
16 leadership and you know once again, want to
17 congratulate you Commissioner Donoghue. I really do
18 believe that you're the right person for the job and
19 the person that's going to help whip the Parks
20 Department into shape and we appreciate it.

21 I wanted to first ask about the significant
22 reduction in capital funding in your five year plan.
23 I think it reduced by about 25 percent from \$5.9
24 billion to \$4.5 billion. I'm certainly very
25 concerned about that. I want to see more money

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2 invested in our parks and get that money out the door
3 quickly and spent efficiently and effectively. Could
4 you speak to the process for how you determine which
5 projects were pushed to the out- pushed into the next
6 five year plan and would appreciate if a list could
7 be sent to me if there are any projects in District
8 33 that were moved out of this five year plan. It's
9 a disconcerting number to see such a significant
10 reduction.

11 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member Restler
12 and I'm really glad you asked the question because we
13 do not see it as a reduction in any way, shape or
14 form. I mean, we see it as we have \$7.7 billion in
15 our capital program. We look at the ten year plan.
16 There was no cut, there was no reduction and in fact,
17 only almost a half a billion dollars addition to our
18 capital plan with the \$500- almost \$500 million that
19 was added.

20 We do absolutely periodically look at you know
21 the capital projects that we have that we're working
22 on and if they're more a long range if they're not -
23 we look at it based on when we anticipate the program
24 is going to go or the project is going to go into
25 construction and we'll move capital dollars out if

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2 it's more long range. If a project ends up going
3 quicker and we have the opportunity to move the fund
4 or start construction sooner, we move those capital
5 funds in earlier. So, it's very fluid but I just, I
6 want to be clear, it's not a reduction. And in fact,
7 you know we have a very, very significant capital
8 program right now, huge.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I'd appreciate that and
10 I appreciate the scale of the capital program. It's
11 not a reduction, certainly a delay and uhm, and
12 that's an unfortunate thing and I think that gets to
13 my next question, which is something I've asked you
14 about before and I know that I think Chair Brannan
15 really got it. The frustrations of the parks capital
16 process and many of my colleagues have commented on
17 how expensive things are and how slow things are and
18 I know that you mentioned you're putting your best
19 people on it. You're taking it seriously.

20 My optimism and faith is invested in you and the
21 Administrations ability to try to improve this. Uhm,
22 you know near broken process, but could you give us
23 any teaser of where you think we can make significant
24 strides. Are there things that the Council can do to
25 improve the capital budget process? Are you planning

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2 to pursue legislation in Albany? Is there any
3 direction that you want to offer for how we're going
4 to try to fix what feels like a broken process?

5 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member Restler
6 and I appreciate the question and I certainly
7 appreciate your frustration. We feel it too. As I
8 said earlier, I do want to emphasize it is a city
9 capital process. It's not a Parks Department, just
10 the Parks Department issue and we are very pleased to
11 be working closely with the administration through
12 this capital reform taskforce.

13 You know I think it is - it's a matter of having
14 the relevant agencies in the room addressing
15 permitting issues, timeliness of turnaround. Having
16 service level agreements. You know really working
17 you know on the procurement process so that there are
18 you know, we know that there are ways to speed it up.
19 In terms of what the Council can do, I just think
20 that your support for you know and acknowledgment of
21 you know, the process needs to be reformed and you
22 know, being very clear about that, we agree and we
23 are you know very invested and working on it and are
24 really pleased that you know kind of right off the

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2 bat, the First Deputy Mayor has prioritized this and
3 put this taskforce together.

4 In terms of seeking reform and you know seeking
5 opportunities in Albany, that is you know to become
6 say a parks authority, that's what you mean right?
7 It's something along those lines. It is as we know a
8 really complicated and lengthy process. It's
9 certainly something that we have considered and
10 looked at. My capital team has done a whole lot of
11 research on it. We would be open to exploring I for
12 sure, but at the same time, you know we really feel
13 like the answer here is to work on the city process
14 and fix that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Yeah, I hope you'll
16 consider Albany. I appreciate the response. I do
17 think there are legislative solutions at the Council
18 that we can partner on as well, that may not be
19 popular but I'm here for, so I hope that you will
20 consider me an ally in that process.

21 And then lastly, as time expires. Every time I
22 ask for a tree to be planted in my district, I'm told
23 for one reason or another no. Any tips for how we
24 get as many of these 20,000 trees in the 33rd?
25 Because I am very frustrated.

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2 SUSAN DONOGHUE: I am really sorry to hear that
3 Council Member Restler. I promise it's not you and
4 it's not Williamsburg. We want to plant you know as
5 widely as we can, so you've got the right people on
6 the phone with Jennifer Greenfeld is here who heads
7 up that whole area.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I'm going to start
9 calling Jennifer and I just want to say in closing, I
10 feel like the Queens and Bronx have now claimed
11 Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa. She started as Vista
12 fellow in Williamsburg. She worked in Bushwick. I
13 think Brooklyn deserves some claim to both you and
14 her. So, thank you for your leadership. We're
15 hopeful that we're going to see some significant
16 improvements in parks.

17 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you, appreciate it.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next, we'll turn
19 to Council Member Kagan followed by Council Member
20 Menin.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member Kagan, are you
23 there? There we do.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KAGAN: Hello. Okay, yes, first
25 of all, thank you Commissioner for being with us

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2 today and thank you for this hearing. Very
3 important. I have two questions. Most of them in my
4 opinion, are related to budget. One is about
5 allocations for restoration of the boardwalk. I know
6 that my predecessor Coney Island Boardwalk. My
7 predecessor allocated \$104.25 million for Coney
8 Island Boardwalk restoration. And I thought this
9 money would be used in 2023 but I learned media
10 reports that they will be useful in 2025. I would
11 like clarity about this money. We're not talking
12 about small change. We're talking about \$140.5,
13 which is a significant amount.

14 And my second question is about stump. Recently
15 at Gravesend, I saw Department of Parks cut a 100-
16 year-old tree and there is a huge stump over there.
17 There's a whole in the middle, which has basically
18 became a hole for dumping garbage. And when we
19 contacted Department of Parks, we were told that it's
20 all about money, that supposedly contractors do not
21 have - are not getting paid this year and they are
22 waiting for money in the next budget for removing
23 this stump. And the advice was for senior colleagues
24 right near the stump to come up with this money to
25 help private contractor and to remove this stump by

2 herself, which is enlightening. Why do we have a
3 Department of Parks if we're forcing people to remove
4 the stumps. So, I mean, supposedly it's a question
5 because the answer was, we don't have funding for the
6 stump removal this year and in terms of timeline, I
7 was told it could be done all the way to like June of
8 next year. And of course the senior is suffering
9 because the stump is right in front of her house and
10 again, it's like, it doesn't great, not just a
11 Brooklyn sidewalk, but its also like became like
12 garbage dump hole. So, that's my two questions.

13 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yeah, thank you Council Member
14 Kagan and first off, thank you for all of your
15 support and advocacy as far as the Coney Island
16 boardwalk. We know that is an iconic, important,
17 hugely, hugely important destination for people
18 across the city and beyond. We care deeply about the
19 boardwalk and I know you've spent a lot of time with
20 our borough commissioner out there and you know that
21 we are working really hard today and on a regular
22 basis to deal with the problems of the boardwalk.
23 The wood that is coming up. It's 1.1 million pieces
24 of wood, so it is an incredibly huge job. We are,
25 you're right, we were so pleased to get this funding

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2 and that funding, what needs to happen because of the
3 significance of the boardwalk, the significant
4 length, number, that 1.1 million pieces of board. We
5 do need to really study how we're going to be able to
6 transform and improve the boardwalk. I know you did
7 a visit out to the Rockaways to see what happened to
8 the boardwalk there. There's a number of different
9 questions that we still need to answer as a community
10 with our elected's. Uhm, you know what is - how is
11 the boardwalk going to be finished? Is it going to
12 be wood? Is it going to be cement? There's a lot of
13 open questions there and also, have to look at what's
14 underneath and drainage and so, it requires study and
15 planning.

16 So, I appreciate the frustration, that's it's not
17 happening overnight. I think that we're trying to do
18 on our end is approach the near term and have people
19 out there and I know Commissioner Marr has people out
20 there every week you now just hammering down the
21 individual wood pieces. And at the same time, we are
22 moving forward to really study this very significant
23 transformation that needs to happen for that iconic
24 landscape. So, we are working on it, trying to
25 adjust both near term and long term and I appreciate

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2 you know your focus on it and your involvement in
3 that process and helping us to determine what is
4 going to be the best and future use and how it's
5 going to be constructed.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KAGAN: But this money would be
7 spent, used in the next financial year, fiscal year
8 or in 2025. That's my question.

9 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Uh, it won't be used all at
10 once, it will be used in phases. Because first what
11 we have to do is we have to bring in consultants. We
12 have to do a study, so portions of it will be used in
13 the near term. It won't wait until 2025 to be
14 utilized. We will be utilizing it more readily.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KAGAN: And my second question was
16 about stumps. Like the process of removing the
17 stumps.

18 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Exactly.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KAGAN: There's no fines in -

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, and I'm so sorry.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

22 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yeah, I'm so sorry that you were
23 told that. That's absolutely not correct. We saw
24 your Tweet earlier today. We saw the picture of the
25 stump. I understand that it is hazardous. We

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2 absolutely see that. It's incorrect that they - I
3 don't know who said that there isn't funding. We've
4 talked earlier on this call and in this testimony
5 about we do have funding for stump removal. There is
6 no doubt that there is a backlog but we do have
7 funding and we will be absolutely addressing that.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KAGAN: Okay, thank you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member.

10 Next, we'll turn to Council Member Menin followed by
11 Council Member Williams.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Thank you so much. First
14 of all, thank you Chair Brannan. Thank you Chair
15 Krishnan for holding this important hearing. So,
16 Commissioner, first of all I just want to echo what
17 my colleague says about the budget cuts at large
18 because in a district I represent, Council District
19 5, we rank 47th out of 51 in terms of one the lowest
20 amounts of open space and in the east Harlem part of
21 my district, we have one the highest childhood asthma
22 and childhood obesity rate. So, I'm deeply concerned
23 about how these budget cuts are going to affect the
24 Parks Departments ability to maintain the existing

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2 park. So, I know my colleagues have asked about that
3 but I wanted to first of all emphasize that.

4 So my first question is about comfort station
5 facilities because some of my colleagues talked about
6 the high prices associated with that. I happen to
7 represent a district that has a lack of them in some
8 of the smaller parks and so, I just want to
9 understand if you could explain why the average price
10 for a parks restroom tripled in the last decade from
11 roughly \$1.3 million in 2011 to over \$3.6 million?

12 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member Menin
13 for the question and definitely understand the
14 importance of comfort stations across the city. The
15 Parks Department has 600 that we maintain that were
16 open and available all through COVID and we're really
17 proud of our ability to provide those facilities for
18 people across the five boroughs. But I know there's
19 always a need for more. I ran Prospect Park before I
20 took on this job. The biggest request we had was for
21 comfort stations, so I know the importance of them.
22 There has been price escalation across all, you know
23 men are building projects. I can't attest to you
24 know specifically in the past decade specifically why
25 but we have seen price escalation. I know in the

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2 near term, you know COVID has impacted that. Supply
3 chain issues have impacted pricing but I do want to
4 say that we are at Parks really looking at many
5 different ways that we can bring that pricing down,
6 including exploring prefabricated structures, ways
7 that we can be innovative and create less expensive,
8 more readily available, easier to construct, quicker
9 to construct and construct comfort stations. That's
10 something that's very much on our radar and that we
11 are exploring ways right now to innovate and to bring
12 down costs and including at looking at Prefab
13 structures.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Okay, okay, thank you. I
15 think it's incredibly important. My second question
16 is I noticed that the Executive Plan doesn't include
17 a roughly \$20 million in one year funding that
18 Council negotiated with the Administration in Fiscal
19 Year 2022 Adopted Budget. So, that included \$3.4
20 million to support more than 550 green thumb gardens
21 with new soil and raise beds and other resources that
22 gardeners need. I really want to advocate for this
23 because for example, in my district where again we
24 have a tremendous lack of parks, we recently as you
25 know, created a new community garden in NYCHA and

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2 Lexington Houses. We need to make sure that these
3 community gardens, these community gardeners have the
4 resources that they need to be able to operate and
5 tend to these gardens.

6 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, couldn't agree with you
7 more Council Member Menin and we so appreciate the
8 Council's support in this. In the Play Fair funding
9 from last year and in particular the support of our
10 green thumb gardens. They are – we recognize they
11 are critical green space. They're critical community
12 gathering areas and the support from the Council on
13 these has been so beneficial. I appreciate you
14 recognizing the great partnership we've done between
15 Green Thumb and NYCHA to expand opportunities for
16 community gardens on NYCHA properties and this
17 funding certainly has helped to be able to facilitate
18 that. Tools, expertise to share and be able to add
19 even more community garden space in NYCHA properties.
20 We recognize it as a really important addition and a
21 really important way to expand access and green space
22 across the city and really appreciate the Council's
23 support for that.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Okay, thank you. Thank
25 you.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member
3 Menin. Council Member Williams, did you still have a
4 question. Your hand was up before in my order.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yes, I do.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you so much. I
8 have a question and I know there's been some
9 questions, I heard Council Member Dinowitz and the
10 Chair mention things around the trees, the forestry
11 and horticulture department. I just wanted to know,
12 I saw and maybe I didn't [LOST AUDIO 5:44:44] budget
13 but it looks like there was a \$5 million decrease.
14 So, I wanted to know where those cuts will be made in
15 the program?

16 SUSAN DONOGHUE: So, I'm sorry Council Member
17 Williams, you cut out there and I couldn't hear you.
18 You said a \$5 million decrease where?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: In the forestry
20 program. I'm sorry, I'm have like tech issues.

21 SUSAN DONOGHUE: A \$5 million decrease in the
22 forestry program.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yeah, from the proposed
24 budget to now, there's a decrease from what it was

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2 before to what we see now, specifically in the
3 forestry department.

4 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Uhm, I am not quite - Matt, do
5 you want to help?

6 MATT DRURY: Sorry, I believe this is a reference
7 to the Council negotiated, the last budget adoption,
8 the one shot funding that was applied towards the
9 forestry management framework. As of right now,
10 obviously we're still in the midst of budget season,
11 this is you know all still being discussed obviously.
12 So, I believe that's what the Council Member is
13 referring to.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Right, so according to
15 what was proposed, what we said, there is a \$5
16 million deficit, so and it's specifically to the
17 forestry unit, so I just wanted to understand like,
18 where those cuts, like what will be cut exactly.
19 Like I heard the Chair mention workers but just
20 wanted to understand like, what will be lost with
21 those cuts?

22 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Of course yes. Thank you and
23 sorry for us being a little confused on that but
24 appreciate the clarification and so appreciate the
25 Council's support for our forestry management

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2 framework and for this one shot funding. It's
3 incredibly beneficial for our forest and natural
4 areas. Jennifer, do you want to just speak on the
5 program?

6 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Sure, thank you so much for
7 the question Council Member Williams. Yeah, we were
8 just thrilled to partner with the Council on the one
9 shot funding through the Play Fair program for the
10 Forest management framework and it is about supports
11 around 35 people. Their gardeners, primarily
12 gardeners and some other natural resource
13 professionals. We will do our best if this doesn't
14 end up getting funded through these continuing
15 ongoing negotiations, we'll do our best to bring
16 those folks on through the increase in our baseline
17 funding in the executive budget that's been proposed
18 by the Mayor. But that's what we're talking about.
19 It's the forest management, restoration and trails
20 and stewardship program.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, so just wanted to
22 know that my district primarily mis-comprised of home
23 owners who really have a lot of issues with some of
24 the tree roots. It's very disruptive. Uhm, so we
25 have about seven zones in my district and right now,

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2 I believe it takes one year to get through one zone.
3 And so, as you can imagine, I'm a little concerned
4 about the cut in that program because we already have
5 an issue with trees really not being pruned and
6 trimmed and even removed that have created a really,
7 really bad situation for home owners. Most of which
8 are middle class, working class folks who have to
9 absorb costs associated by tree root issues and the
10 other thing that I just wanted to flag and I heard
11 you mention that there's some more money in the
12 budget to plant more trees. And so, really, a lot of
13 people in my district have gotten extremely educated
14 on the types of trees. I really just want to urge
15 the Department to look at trees that make sense in
16 urban areas that don't grow as large roots because it
17 is very frustrating as you can imagine for home
18 owners to walk out and see a bright new tree. And
19 then fear you know, a potential root issue.

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Sure, thank you. If you don't
21 mind I can just jump in on that. Thank you Council
22 Member. I just want to clarify that there are no
23 cuts to the tree pruning budget in the Executive
24 Budget. That hasn't been changed, so we still can

25

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2 maintain our average seven year rotation, which is
3 sort of professional standard for tree pruning.

4 I just want to make sure you know there is no
5 cuts to that piece of the budget. And in terms of
6 species, I understand what you're saying, that we
7 learn over time and there are some trees that are
8 particularly problematic in terms of shallow roots
9 and we don't plant those types of trees anymore. We
10 haven't for many years but we do have a legacy of
11 that and for better or for worse, those are some of
12 our largest trees and we have to deal with them as
13 they age as all of us have to deal with things as we
14 age and we take care of those issues but we are no
15 longer planting those trees that have caused the
16 greatest problems.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, thank you. I
19 just hope that you can focus on the program and try
20 to create more fluent criteria around when a tree
21 needs to be serviced. Because we have a lot of tree
22 issues and the biggest concern that I hear is
23 resource and funding and not having the necessary
24 arborists and other folks to actually do the work, so
25 thanks.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next, we'll call
3 on Council Member Brewer followed by - I'm not seeing
4 Council Member Brooks-Powers, followed by Council
5 Member Ariola. We'll first start with Council Member
6 Brewer.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you Commissioner.
10 I know you're doing a good job, even though you're
11 from Brooklyn. Everybody says you're doing a good
12 job.

13 Uhm, first of all, about the number of trees,
14 because the Borough President, is going to plant one
15 million trees. Are those your trees they're
16 planting? I assume they are.

17 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, it would be, yes.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, they're counting your
19 trees as their trees. I think you should say that
20 because it doesn't sound fair. So, they think
21 they're going to do a million including your 800,000
22 or 80,000, whatever it is?

23 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You said 80,000 right?

25 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, we -

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: There's a big difference.
3 What are they talking about?

4 SUSAN DONOGHUE: So sorry, Council Member.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The Borough Presidents
6 made a big four person letter saying they are doing
7 to plant one million trees. So, it's a big - I don't
8 know if they've got extra money beyond their 80,000.
9 Obviously, they are including your 80,000. In
10 addition, they, I guess over an x-number of years,
11 they think they're going to plant more. Is that the
12 idea? I just was trying to understand where I'm
13 going to get my trees from.

14 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member Brewer
15 for the question. They are - it was very much a
16 desire to work with the administration to plant a
17 million more trees in the city. So, it is at this
18 point, it's not a funded option as far as I know.
19 What is funded is our 20,000 trees a year for the
20 next four years. So, it's 80,000 new street trees.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay that's clear.
22 Number two, when you do that, I believe that OMB
23 having listed this for the last 40-years will not put
24 tree guards because they're not eligible. Is that
25 right or wrong? Because every body asks me for tree

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2 guards. I think the block has got to pay for their
3 own damn tree guards.

4 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Uhm, Matt Drury, he's on the
5 line, seems to have an answer to that, Matt.

6 MATT DRURY: And Commissioner Greenfeld can
7 obviously speak in here. So, tree guards can
8 accompany trees when they're being newly planted,
9 that is capitally eligible.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, that means the person
11 who is present in the future, also asks for a tree
12 guard. Is that what they basically do? Because
13 nobody really knows what to do. A tree appears with
14 no tree guard. That's the norm, so how do we get the
15 tree with the tree guard. I know that sounds stupid
16 but that's all I get asked. So, when they come
17 together.

18 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Council Member Brewer, thank
19 you for the question. Okay, so it is confusing. We
20 are not funded for a tree guard program perse but if
21 the question is, can you use capital funds for tree
22 guards? Yes you can. You can fund them as long as
23 it is accompanied with the new tree. So, I know
24 that's a little confusing.

25

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Then how the hell do you
3 know when the tree shows up to put the tree guard
4 with it with Reso. A? I'm just saying, they come at
5 different times, so.

6 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Right, so we've worked with
7 Council Members, many of whom have allocated some of
8 their capital allocation to tree guard programs. And
9 then, we coordinate with that Council Member how to
10 sort of time those tree guards along with new trees.
11 But yes, you are correct. It is a little bit of a
12 confusing situation. We'll try to follow-up with
13 you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, number two. Not
15 anywhere on anybody's budget but mine. I want
16 jointly operated playgrounds. In other words, the
17 public goes into a space and the playground is hot
18 and it begins in the summer. Unless you - thank God
19 or it's the trust of the public land.

20 So, I want to see a program that opens up all the
21 playgrounds in the schools. Now, you need money for
22 the custodian, Richard Murphy did that years ago on
23 the ones that are DOE classified. So, have we been
24 thinking about that or is that not even on your
25 agenda? I'm not saying for this year. We're kind of

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2 down the road. If you want to have something that
3 the Mayor, the Council and everybody, people want to
4 see something. They don't see you; you know all the
5 great gardeners. I have a lot of parks. Everybody
6 is ecstatic about the horticultures that they're
7 hiring this summer. And I know this issue was
8 September 15th. I don't know about the 4th but people
9 are happy to get through the summer. But my question
10 is, do you have any big picture ideas about
11 playgrounds? Other than, you don't have to fix them
12 up when they are generally operating. I'm saying,
13 it's a lot of money to open up these spaces so that
14 the public can use them. Make sure the money is
15 [INAUDIBLE 5:55:09]. Any ideas on that?

16 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, thank you Council Member
17 Brewer for asking. I am a big fan of school yards to
18 playground for sure during my last tenure at the
19 Parks Department. It was one of my Play NYC projects
20 that I oversaw and so, I know their value, I know
21 how beneficial they can be to communities, especially
22 the communities that lack access to open space.
23 You're absolutely right, I'm pointing out it needs to
24 be a collaboration with DOE because the big issue is
25 the maintenance dollars to open and close the school

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2 yard at the end of the day. But it is a big picture.
3 Absolutely a big picture item for me and something
4 that I would like to be able to pursue. I think it's
5 an important equity, way to expand equity and access
6 across the city.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I don't want that ten
9 minute crap because I am too close to the - I don't
10 want no damn ten minutes. Right, right now, you can
11 get a playground if you're ten minutes away from a
12 park. I'm too close to the park. I don't want no
13 damn ten minutes. I figured I would move, otherwise,
14 I don't want the program.

15 A real quick thing is, I know you talked earlier,
16 thank you with regard to the rats and the trash and
17 the bins and all that. Is like would it be
18 everywhere. They're expensive? Just give me a sense
19 because if you want to say, what's a complaint, it
20 would be nice if it was you know rats isn't growing.
21 It's the rats.

22 So, I know you talked about it but just give me a
23 sense of what the landscape is. Rats go where the
24 trash is. That simple. Get rid of the trash, the
25 rates go away.

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2 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, thank you Council Member
3 Brewer and we couldn't agree more and uhm, so that's
4 why we are pleased that there is funding in the
5 budget both for new trash cans that are beneficial
6 that help seal in the trash and a rat abatement
7 program. We're working really hard at the Parks
8 Department to you know constantly looking for ways to
9 make sure that we are reducing the amount of exposed
10 trash to deal with the rat problem. So, it's
11 something we're really focused on.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, and I know I'm out
13 of time but the trash cans will be citywide,
14 replacing whatever is a mesh can is really the idea
15 or what?

16 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely citywide
17 overtime replacing mesh cans, yes.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next, we'll turn
20 to Council Member Ariola.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Okay, thank you Chairs
23 for the time. Most recently, I've been vocal about a
24 proposed closing of a stretch of beach in my district

25

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2 along the Rockaway Peninsula with the continuation of
3 a growing construction project.

4 Commissioner, shortly after our call last night,
5 Parks released a detailed press release with
6 timelines and notifications for which beaches would
7 be closed. Have sand only access or be completely
8 open. When first released, the area of Beach 97th
9 through 108th were not part of the release. That's
10 the stretch where our concessionaires are located.
11 After parks received calls from the media, those
12 blocks were then added to the release in the category
13 of having sand only access seven days per week,
14 through July 15th. This plan is going to be a major
15 economic hit for our local businesses and seriously
16 curtail the use of Rockaway Beach for recreation for
17 people throughout the five boroughs.

18 Is July 15th total usage beach reopening a hard
19 date for the beaches listed or is it contingent on
20 changes as the construction advances?

21 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member Ariola
22 for the question and appreciate you know; we
23 understand that this is a huge inconvenience. We are
24 also concerned about the impacts but as you know,
25 this is an important resiliency project coming out of

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2 Sandy. And really focused on keeping the communities
3 in the Rockaways safe and making sure that we are
4 addressing the devastating impacts of beach erosion
5 and protecting the communities in the Rockaways that
6 were so hard hit from Sandy. We have tried to be
7 really specific and thank you for mentioning the
8 press release. We are doing everything we can to
9 make sure that we are allowing access to the beach
10 and having as much of the beach open as is possible,
11 while this important construction is happening.

12 You asked about the July 15th date. That's the
13 date we're getting from the Army Corp of Engineers,
14 that they will be finished with this project in this
15 area. So, we will be holding them to account. I'm
16 sure you will be holding them to account as well.
17 That's the date we're getting from them.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: In conversations our
19 offices had with the Army Corp of Engineers. They've
20 noted that they've done work like this before and
21 they've already told us that they can work on an
22 alternative timeframe and schedules to make the beach
23 available for both swimmers and sun bathers and it
24 would be a safe plan. If the USACE can be flexible
25 in their hours of operation, so that lifeguards can

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2 get on the beach and ensure that people can swim
3 safely, then that really is what we should be doing.
4 Why is parks not considering the USACE's proposed
5 plan, which would allow the beaches to be safely
6 used?

7 SUSAN DONOGHUE Thank you Council Member Ariola
8 for raising this and we are certainly, we're really
9 concerned about the impacts. We know that this is
10 really difficult to be happening at this of year but
11 we are at first and foremost concerned about safety.
12 The issues with this area that's under construction
13 and part of the reason why it's under construction is
14 the narrowness of the beach in that area and the
15 issue is in terms of safety for swimmers. We have to
16 place the lifeguard chairs on the beach with enough
17 of an area between where the lifeguard chair is
18 placed and the beach front to allow visual up and
19 down the beach and because of the narrowness that the
20 hall road of this construction is creating. I don't
21 feel like we can safely be able to set up those
22 lifeguard chairs to have the correct line of vision
23 to be able to safely monitor the beach for swimmers
24 during this period.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: However, the USACE does
3 disagree with that, that train of thought. They
4 believe that they could have enough room to do the
5 project beach – the portion of the beach for
6 lifeguard chairs and for people to be able to utilize
7 the beach at a certain point.

8 Moving to another subject, how many lifeguards
9 are currently hired and at the ready through Rockaway
10 Beach for Memorial Day?

11 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you for the question. We
12 don't have a firm answer for that yet, because we
13 still are in the process of training our lifeguards.
14 We have a group that's in training and then a big
15 portion of the lifeguards that are deployed on our
16 beaches and not our pools come back. They have to be
17 recertified. They're returning lifeguards, so that
18 process is happening right now of both training and
19 recertifications. So, we don't have an exact number
20 yet. As soon as we do, we'll be happy to follow up
21 with you.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: So, what then what is the
23 exact number of retraining in people in training
24 right now?

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Uhm, Iris, do you want to
3 take that?

4 IRIS RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: No, so we've had about 143
5 people that are just about finishing some training
6 right now and then we have about another I would say
7 60 or so that are in the second round of training to
8 do that as well. So, these are new individuals that
9 are actually going to be new lifeguards and in the
10 process at the same time, we're recertifying the
11 others that are coming in. They have to make sure
12 that they have the proper documentation and all of
13 that. So, as the Commissioner mentioned, we'll have
14 some better numbers by about mid-week next week.
15 We're meeting with them to find out and to break down
16 exactly how many we'll have in the Rockaways.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: And how far below the
18 budgeted dumper of lifeguards are we currently at
19 right now, certified and ready to go?

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Again, we haven't completed that
21 process Council Member Ariola, so we can't give you
22 an exact number. We right now have -

23 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Commissioner, I'm just
24 going to stop you right there. We're literally 15-
25 days away from the beach opening. Honestly, not

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2 knowing is completely unacceptable. So, what I'm
3 going to say is, I'm going to look forward to
4 continued discussion prior to the beach opening with
5 your department. Thank you.

6 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Absolutely Council Member Ariola
7 and we'll look forward to that too and we'll keep you
8 in good touch for sure.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Appreciate it.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member.
11 Seeing that she's back on, we'll turn to Council
12 Member Brooks-Powers followed by Council Member
13 Sanchez.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member Brooks-Powers,
16 are you there? Okay, Council Member Sanchez.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Hello and good afternoon
18 Commissioner. Great to see you. So, and thank you
19 so much to the two Chairs and Council Member Krishnan
20 for your fierce advocacy on behalf of resources for
21 our parks.

22 So, my first question, a quick one. For the \$136
23 million Tree Planting Initiative, how will the
24 locations be determined?

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2 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member Sanchez
3 for that question. We are really pleased with that
4 budget for our tree planting. As I said, it is the
5 largest we've had in the last four years. In terms
6 of locations for that, Jennifer, do you want to take
7 that one?

8 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Sure. Thank you for your
9 question Council Member Sanchez. Uhm, I would say
10 we're trying to balance a lot of needs. One of our
11 major priorities is looking at these communities that
12 have been identified by the department of health and
13 mental hygiene called the heat vulnerability index.
14 The one's with the highest uhm ratings and so, that's
15 a major priority and we'd also like to get to some of
16 the backlog of requests that we have. So, we want to
17 both please folks who are really looking for trees
18 and folks who really need trees, even if they are not
19 asking for them.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Great, thank you so
21 much. Yeah, we suffer greatly from Urban Heat Island
22 and a lot of places in my community, so I just wanted
23 to ask about that. Good to hear.

24 And then the second question is one that I wonder
25 how parks has been thinking about and tackling which

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2 is the issue of motorized devices and scooters and
3 things like that being used in our parks. At St.
4 James Parks, at Aqueduct, a lot of my parks here, the
5 bigger parks in District 14. We have these motorized
6 vehicles. You know, I'm six months pregnant and I've
7 almost gotten taken down a couple of times. So, just
8 you know your partnership, how you would think about
9 that. I've asked signage for some of our parks but
10 beyond that, how is parks thinking about this
11 problem?

12 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member Sanchez
13 and I'm sorry to hear that you've had issues, felt in
14 danger from these in our parks and we recognize that
15 it is a real issue and it's a significant concern of
16 ours because we so prioritize safety across all of
17 our parks. Uhm, right now our rules do state these
18 motorized vehicles are not allowed in parks and we do
19 have signage at our entrances that state that. I'm
20 going to - our Deputy Commissioner Mark Focht would
21 be better able to handle you know the signage
22 question but we are very much concerned about safety
23 and those and that's why we you know right now, our
24 rules to prohibit motorized vehicles in parks. We do
25 work with our parks enforcement patrol, with PD to

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2 try and work on enforcement and keeping people safe
3 but they at this point should not be and are not
4 allowed in our parks. Mark, do you want to just talk
5 about signage a little?

6 MARK FOCHT: Certainly, thank you Commissioner
7 and uh, Council Member Sanchez, we're aware of your
8 request and I'm working with the Chief of Ops, Larry
9 Scoones in the Bronx. We have what are called call
10 out signs, which are bright yellow signs that
11 reiterate the message that's on the consolidated rule
12 signs that e-bikes, scooters and ATV's are prohibited
13 on park property, as the Commissioner noted.

14 So, you'll be seeing those going up shortly along
15 Aqueduct walk and the other places where you
16 requested that signage. Thank you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Great, thank you, thank
18 you. And I asked a similar question at the DOT
19 hearing because this is a broader problem even
20 outside of our parks. And so, lastly, I have a
21 smaller park in my neighborhood, Davidson Playground
22 only has one entrance and no other egress, which I
23 think is a you know, I've heard from neighbors that
24 that's a community, a safety concern. So, just a
25 question there about you know accessibility and

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2 safety and could we work on that together to improve
3 that particular park?

4 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely Council Member
5 Sanchez. We'd be happy to do that and our Deputy
6 Commissioner Mark just mentioned Larry Scoones, who
7 is our Chief of Operations up there. We'd be happy
8 to take a look and absolutely work with you on you
9 know ways to improve it and improve access.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Excellent, thank you so
11 much. We'll reach out.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member.
13 Council Member Brooks-Powers.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Hi, can you hear
16 me?

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Uhm, hi
19 Commissioner. It's great to see you again and thank
20 you for your testimony and your team. Thank you
21 Chair Krishnan and Brannan for convening today's
22 Executive Budget hearing. Just a few questions.
23 One, uhm, can the department provide an update on the
24 ongoing renovations on Bays Water Park? Also, I
25 heard you talking about MWBE's with Council Member

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2 Narcisse. I'm thankful that the conversation did
3 come up but I also want to dig a little deeper and
4 understand you diversity within diversity strategies
5 because often times when we talk about MWBE
6 participation, what it ends up being is participation
7 in terms of WBE's at a higher rate than MBE's. And
8 even with an MBE, still seeing little to no
9 participation by primarily Black but Black and Brown
10 contractors. I also want to know how the parks plans
11 to continue to invest in and support MWBE
12 concessionaires along the boardwalk, especially in
13 Rockaway Beach. What kind of support does the agency
14 currently offer.

15 And then, in terms of projects or concessions, I
16 know they're having these pop-up coming up along the
17 boardwalk. So, like today for example, I received an
18 email with concern that there was no communication
19 with the local community about a container pop-up
20 that was coming to the community.

21 And so, just wanting to understand like just
22 generally speaking what that process should look
23 like. How could we better work together with it,
24 with the Parks Department rather and the community to
25 make sure that we are achieving the sought after MWBE

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2 participation goals as well as engage in the
3 community around what they'd like to see.

4 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member Brooks-
5 Powers. I appreciate the questions. As I stated
6 earlier, you know we are so focused on MWBE
7 contractors and have had you know, had great success
8 and really worked hard and it's now 30 percent of our
9 contracts. We are in the top three in the city.

10 It's something we take very seriously. But you asked
11 really good and relevant questions and to dig into
12 it, I'm going to just hand it over to our Deputy
13 Commissioner for Administration Joy Wang to talk a
14 little bit more in depth about the MWBE contractors.

15 JOY WANG: Uhm, hi Councilwoman. So, a parks
16 takes MWBE program very seriously. We focus and we
17 really focus on the diversity within diversity. So,
18 much, we adhere to the citywide preference that even
19 if we do an MWBE small purchase, we target a Black,
20 Hispanic and Asian female of diverse first to exhaust
21 them first before we go to a bigger pool.

22 The other aspect that we in terms of innovations,
23 the MWBE program that we do do is that you know parks
24 innovated the PQL, the Pre-Qualified List where
25 roughly half is MWBE, the other half is if it's a

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2 non-MWBE, they would subcontract a large portion of
3 that contract with MWBE. We've used this
4 successfully to grow and there be a vendor, so
5 eventually hopefully they will become a prime vendor
6 with us and currently we're expanding this program in
7 include small building renovations and to grow
8 another, basically grow the MWBE pool. So, that
9 they, one day, they will continue to work with us on
10 larger contracts.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you and in
12 terms of Bays Water Park, the renovation?

13 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, thank you Council Member.
14 So, the Bays Water Park, the design is expected to be
15 completed this spring and then it will go into
16 procurement. Really exciting significant project,
17 obviously \$52 million total for that park redesign.
18 So, hoping to be in procurement this spring and we
19 will certainly follow-up with you and let you know
20 when that happens.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you
22 Commissioner and I'll just close with saying that you
23 know I know it was mentioned before in terms of the
24 timeline for a lot of these projects. So, even like
25 the Beach 59th Street Playground, continues to get

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2 delays after delays and I, along with the local
3 Congressman, Borough State Senate and Assembly Member
4 have held meetings with the Parks Department, the
5 Army Corp Engineers collectively and look at the
6 projects from the east to the west end of the
7 peninsula, which I share with the Council Member
8 Ariola.

9 And there is a glaring disparity in terms of the
10 timeline with the projects on the west end versus the
11 east end. A lot of the projects on the Bayside that
12 we've been waiting to see even begin. And then the
13 projects that have begun, take you know a long time
14 where uhm, you know in other parts of the community
15 that's not the case and so, I'm hoping that under
16 your leadership, we'll see a shift in that. We'd
17 love to see Beach 59th Street Playground back on
18 track in it's timeline. And we welcome you to come
19 out to the community and I'm looking forward to
20 seeing the beach opening in another week or so.

21 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member, I
22 appreciate that. I can assure you that there should
23 not be and there is not a capital program or
24 planning, a discrepancy between east side and west
25 side. I apologize if there are delays but I can

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2 assure you it's not based on location. It's more
3 just a complication to the capital process. But I
4 will look forward to visiting and also seeing you at
5 the beach opening.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you and our final
8 questions will be from Council Member Barron followed
9 by Council Member Lee, followed by Council Member
10 Yeger. Council Member Barron.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you so much
13 Commissioner. How are you?

14 SUSAN DONOGHUE: I'm well, thank you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Well, you know I have
16 nothing but big, big ups for Commissioner Marty Mars
17 and the work that he's doing in Brooklyn and
18 particularly in my particular district, we've had
19 several parks renovated and I must say in a timely
20 fashion and we are very, very pleased. You're
21 probably the first and probably the only agency that
22 I'm so pleased with. I've been beating up on all the
23 other Commissioners. You really, yeah.

24 Oh, but I do want to see - I want to clear
25 because you keep talking about a record amount of

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2 money being you know funded but yet, isn't it in the
3 FY22 Adopted Budget, there was \$619 million and then
4 in this one it's \$601 million, which represents a uh,
5 about a \$29 million cut. So, you know you can make
6 records and still be cut. I just want to let you
7 know that. Because I used to uhm, and then in
8 addition to that whether the finances meets all the
9 needs. See, there's different kinds of things, like
10 you can get a certain amount of money. I used to
11 tell everybody that when the governor and I used to
12 fight and argue when I was in the assembly. I think
13 he said that I'm gone and I'm glad he's gone.

14 But he always used to say we have a record amount
15 of money for education. And from 2010 on, it was a
16 record each year because of inflation, the cost of
17 everything. A matter of fact, every city budget is a
18 record. This is a \$99.7 billion budget, so there all
19 records. So, are you cut or not?

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: First of all Council Member
21 Barron, thank you for saying that you're pleased with
22 our operations in Brooklyn and that you don't have
23 complaints, that you know, projects have gone well.
24 I really appreciate that and it's really good to
25 hear.

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2 As far as the historic record, the numbers here,
3 we do consider it historic in the sense that you're
4 right. Last year the number was bigger but that was
5 from federal funding. One shot federal funding that
6 was put into our budget as part of COVID relief
7 funding. So, we always knew that that was going
8 away. We knew that wasn't going to be an ongoing
9 part of our budget that federal funding, so this is
10 historic for us in the sense that it's baselined
11 expense budget for the agency.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Well, let me ask you
13 this. Did the federal money cover areas that are not
14 being covered now?

15 SUSAN DONOGHUE: It was definitely beneficial to
16 have that funding and have the additional workers but
17 as of stated, the important thing for us, what we're
18 really focused on is having full-time year round
19 workers that we can train. That will stay with us.
20 That can grow and develop careers and advance in the
21 Parks Department and that will be with us for a long
22 time. That can become familiar with the you know the
23 neighbors using the parks that become full-time part
24 of our agency rather than people that are cycling out
25 every six months.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: But the 19 - whatever
3 amount of million that was no longer funded, would
4 that hurt in any area? Would it cause a problem in
5 any other area and would it create a need for that
6 money?

7 The reason why I'm saying that because I've been
8 fighting when I was up in the assembly and I'm saying
9 the same thing for the City Council. All of the
10 federal money should be matched by the city and the
11 state. And so, that when it's gone, there still
12 operating at the same level as opposed to a drop.
13 And even though it's more of a budget, it's still,
14 there's a greater need than that time as well.

15 So, is it causing any kind of drop? Because if
16 so, then it would be good if you say this money is
17 good but we still need, so that we can fight for
18 those needs.

19 SUSAN DONOGHUE: There is no doubt that we need,
20 rely on, really appreciate the support of the City
21 Council and helping to be additive to our budget and
22 helping to support and fund additional workers as you
23 have in the past and that really would get us to a
24 historic high, to be able to have those additions

25

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2 from the Council to help support the Parks Department
3 Budget.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: No, no, I was talking
5 about from the Mayor. From the Mayor.

6 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Understood, yes. Yeah, so the
7 lines that are ending, the federal lines are ending,
8 we've worked hard to move those people into some of
9 our seasonal lines that we have each year and -

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 SUSAN DONOGHUE: And in some of these new
12 positions.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Right, so those people
14 should be alright.

15 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, we're looking to move as
16 many as we can into seasonal positions or have
17 opportunities in these new lines that we are hiring.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member
20 Barron. I'm not seeing Council Member Lee, so we
21 will turn to Council Member Yeger.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER YEGER: Thank you very much.
24 Sorry, I was anticipating my colleague going first.
25 Okay, good to see you Commissioner. Thank you very

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2 much. I like to go at the end you'll find in our
3 time together because I get to the point in the
4 program where everything's been said but not
5 everybody said it.

6 And so maybe my questions will be a little
7 briefer but you know just starting from the very
8 beginning of today's hearing, Council Member Brannan
9 set it out very clearly, so I'm not going to go
10 through the trials and tribulation of getting the
11 capital project funded but I will tell you that from
12 my own perspective now in my 5th year, only in my
13 first year did I put capital money into parks, simply
14 because I can't. I can't pay \$3 million for a
15 bathroom. I just can't do it. I don't get enough
16 money to do that. And I do think that the question
17 of why it costs so much is probably three different
18 categories but I want to start before I say that with
19 recognizing that you're new, so none of this is your
20 fault.

21 So, you get the benefit of that. With me and I'm
22 sure with my colleagues, I also want to say that you
23 know the Mayor was our borough president here in
24 Brooklyn and I know him well enough to know that few
25 things frustrate him more than government bureaucracy

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2 for no good reason. And so, I expect very much that
3 you'll be able to come here next year and tell us
4 that things have substantially changed for the
5 better. But just in terms of reason for the cost, my
6 impression is number one, is there's a misery
7 surcharge that contractors tack on just for doing
8 business with the city.

9 But number two is, I think they do it because
10 they can get away with it. They can get it and I do
11 believe that when you see a cost like Councilman
12 Holden described of, a \$6 million cost that is then
13 \$3 million that you know none of this real and not to
14 compare it to the FDNY's bathrooms of - uh, kitchens
15 of \$1.2 million but it's really the same. Because
16 contractors know they can rip off the city and people
17 just sign off on it and you know it's a jobs program
18 that is never ending. And I think that if you put
19 together a list of contractors who come in at high
20 bids that just make no sense and blacklist them, it
21 will end very quickly.

22 And don't do business with contractors who
23 overbid projects, knowing that they're going to get
24 it. Just simply do business with others and I think

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2 we'll get to a place where the numbers will start to
3 come in a little lower.

4 That wasn't a question, that was just my random
5 thoughts but I'm not the Commissioner, so that's on
6 you.

7 I just want to very briefly talk about - I wasn't
8 planning on saying anything about this but
9 Councilwoman Brewer, the former Borough President
10 brought this up and I agree so much with her that I
11 just have to say this. The DOE playgrounds are just
12 so important and you know as a member of the Council
13 sits here and listens to the discussion from various
14 members throughout the city, you come to an
15 understanding that you know it never ceases to
16 fascinate me how different this city is. You know
17 from beachfront to urban to suburban. A neighborhood
18 that I represent, more suburban than others but also
19 land locked.

20 Also, the distinction of upward of 90 percent of
21 the children I represent do not attend public
22 schools. Which means that they never get to access
23 those playgrounds when the principal of the school
24 decides one morning that he or she is going to lock
25 the playground, which I see too frequently.

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2 So if there's a way to work out that you can get
3 control of those playgrounds from DOE, you are in the
4 business of playground, not the Department of
5 Education and I would love to see that and lend every
6 effort that I can, although I am relatively powerless
7 because I'm just a Council Member but I would love to
8 help you out there if we can do that. And I think you
9 know along the lines of I think that the mayor frowns
10 on bureaucracy, I think it would be much smarter for
11 your department to be in charge of the playgrounds
12 and not the department that's in charge of educating
13 kids. Let them do the educating and let you do the
14 playing.

15 Just very briefly, this will be my last combined
16 two topics and I'll try to get it in within a minute
17 and I appreciate the Chair if he can squeeze me in a
18 couple of extra seconds.

19 The dangerous sidewalk conditions are literally a
20 vane of my existence. You're soon to be, sure but
21 mine, I've been a Council Member for four years
22 before now and on a Community Board for 18 years and
23 uh, you know you see it and you call it out and you
24 say something and then you find out that you know,
25 there are trees, there are sidewalks that are on a

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2 list for seven years to get repaired. I literally
3 had this engagement with the Deputy Commissioner. I
4 think at last years budget hearings but it's not just
5 that I want to point out the obvious. I just want to
6 say something else in relation to that. That you
7 know and I'm not saying that I know what the solution
8 is. I know that I would just call the guy who does
9 the sidewalks who has a company closet to where ever
10 the sidewalk needs to be repaired and have them go
11 there and fix it within 24 hours of getting the call
12 and then it will be fixed and then we can all move
13 on. I guess government doesn't work as efficiently
14 as just regular people do, but I will say that you
15 know there are so many constituents of mine, of my
16 colleagues, the clock - I'll wait for the Sergeant to
17 say his thing.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER YEGER: Thank you very much Serg.
20 Uhm, there are so many constituents of mine and my
21 colleagues who have sidewalk violations as you know
22 where the Department of Buildings come and either as
23 a revenue enhancer or for whatever reason decide to
24 mark a tiny crack on a sidewalk with, if you don't
25 get this fixed in five seconds, we're going to send a

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2 guy to go do it and then before you blink twice, they
3 sent the guy to go do it. And he gets a bill on his
4 house for you know thousands of dollars more than it
5 ought to really cost.

6 My point of saying this is not to blame you for
7 the Department of Buildings or Department of
8 Transportation. They are entitled to their own blame
9 but simply to say that the city as a matter of policy
10 recognizes that sidewalks are dangerous when
11 maintained in disrepair or not maintained at all to
12 the point where they're willing to send people out to
13 go and fix it on an emergency repair basis. Why
14 can't the Parks Department avail themselves of the
15 same process and simply say, a sidewalk is so
16 dangerous that it has to be repaired immediately.

17 Now before I and you're nodding your head and my
18 time is long gone and I want to be very respectful of
19 the Chairs who have been incredible, so I'm going to
20 go and let you do your thing but before I do, I would
21 be remiss if I didn't take the opportunity to agree
22 with my Brooklyn colleagues, particularly because
23 Council Member Barron and I never really find time to
24 agree. And I find myself in agreement with him on
25 Commissioner Mark. He's been incredible. His service

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2 long predates mine and simply a go get it kind of
3 guy, get it done and if you could make his job easier
4 by cutting out the bureaucracy, you know, he is the
5 happiest parks guy in the city. I know every one of
6 my colleagues say that their parks commissioner is
7 the best but mine in Brooklyn is the best and you'll
8 get to know him I'm sure better. You know him
9 already but I just did want to say that before I go.

10 And just the last thing, the list of trees.
11 Literally, a day ago I was engaging in an email
12 exchange. A constituent of mine on their own was
13 talking to the forestry department and was told that
14 they have a backlog of trees going back to 2018 and
15 request a plan. It just can't be that I could pick
16 up a phone and call a guy to go plant a tree and
17 he'll be there tomorrow. And the Parks Department
18 has a five year old list. It can't be right and I
19 don't know what you can do but I know you want to do
20 something and so, I just wanted to put these in front
21 of you.

22 And with that, I want to thank very much my
23 colleagues, the Chairs for allowing me this extra
24 time.

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2 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Well, thank you Councilman
3 Yeger. I appreciate all of those insights and I do;
4 I recognize your frustration on some of these things.
5 It's frustrating for us as well. Know that we are
6 doing what we can to try and cut through the red tape
7 and bureaucracy. We are you know for a number of
8 reasons; you know there are rules and regulations in
9 place that we must follow in terms of who we can
10 contract with and who we can have - do things for us
11 across the city but we're working really hard as
12 you've heard on this hearing today to try and
13 eliminate and address delays as much as we can.

14 So, I appreciate your support and all your
15 support for parks out in Brooklyn and know that we'll
16 be continuing to work on making improvements.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER YEGER: Okay so just as a follow
18 up to close out this line of questioning, just very
19 quickly. Can you just commit, you know I don't want
20 to like you know make you do anything or whatever but
21 can you just say like two, three months when budget
22 time is over, things have calmed down. The summer is
23 already happening. Your lifeguards are in place,
24 that you informally know no big spiel but just
25 somehow come back and tell, us in writing or phone

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2 call or whatever. What's being fixed precisely and
3 what it is that's changed.

4 And I know because you come from the nonprofit
5 sector not from internally in government. You have a
6 better and broader view of the bureaucracy. But I
7 just, we frequently hear from Commissioners. You
8 know thank you so much for your questions. We know
9 it's a problem. We'll get on it and thank you so
10 much and we'll see you this time next year.

11 And I don't think you want that at all, so I'm
12 hopeful that may be you can just say, hey in
13 September, we'll talk to you again or whatever, I
14 mean just something.

15 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yup, absolutely. I'm happy to
16 commit to doing that for sure.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER YEGER: Thank you very much and
18 thanks to your team Commissioner. Thank you.

19 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And I see her back on.
21 Council Member Lee.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Hi, sorry, I'll make it
23 quick. I had to hop off for a little bit. Thank you
24 so much Commissioner and to the Chairs. I know it's
25 been a long hearing, so I'll make it quick. I think

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2 uhm, the question I had - I just had really two quick
3 questions. Uhm, so I know that in terms of the
4 capital funding, a lot of folks have been asking
5 about that but I guess my question is more about the
6 scarcity of capital funding itself because I know the
7 Parks is dependent on a lot of the elected officials
8 for capital funds. You know obviously each of us
9 have a limited budget of \$5 million each for our own
10 pot and more of the larger pots of money come from
11 the borough presidents, the Mayor or other officials.

12 But what can we do from your opinion to ensure
13 stability, consistency, in terms of parks capital
14 projects? Because I just, I feel like especially
15 when it comes to the parks that are connected to the
16 schools, which I have a ton of in my district. I
17 think it just makes me, it disheartens me because
18 there's a lot of student body changes, especially
19 with the disabilities community or students that need
20 playgrounds with different types of equipment, and
21 so, uhm, you know where do you sort of see that
22 budget you know push happening?

23 And then, my other question, which I'll just ask
24 quickly back to back, is uhm, you know there's also
25 folks that have brought up the Parks and patrol

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2 officers or lack thereof and I totally heard you
3 earlier when you said that it is baselined I believe.
4 But I know that for a lot of the outer boroughs, the
5 public private partnerships, the private side is not
6 as well endowed.

7 And so, I'm just trying to figure out or see from
8 your perspective what can be done to ensure more
9 dedicated coverage from the parks patrol officers
10 because I know that in the parks in my district for
11 example Cunningham and Ally Pond, they're very large
12 and their right next door to residential areas and
13 so, we've been just getting a lot of phone calls
14 about just things happening in the evenings and you
15 know even during the day time with you know a lot of
16 influx of like schools and the kids all coming back
17 and so a lot of the questions that we've been getting
18 and calls we've been getting is just what more can be
19 done on that front and so, just wanted to get your
20 thoughts on that.

21 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Okay, thank you Council Member
22 Lee and I appreciate it. In terms of on the capital
23 funding side, as I said, you know our ten year
24 capital plan is \$7.7 billion. It's really quite
25 significant and in this budget cycle, we received an

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2 additional \$500 million. So, significant capital
3 influx and a lot of good money to put to use for
4 sure. We are in terms of you know really touching
5 every area of the city, you know there's a couple
6 different things in that you know capital allocation
7 for this year. We were so pleased to have state of
8 good repair money baselined for us, \$186 million.
9 It's a significant investment and us being able to
10 take care of our property. Our roofs, our buildings,
11 turf fields to really retaining walls, to really be
12 able to you know with our own budget and with our own
13 resources be able to go out there and really address
14 capital issues that need to be addressed.

15 We also in terms of being you know able to really
16 kind of touch parks in all boroughs, the Community
17 Parks Initiative, which was baselined by the previous
18 administration, it's over \$450 million allows us to
19 deploy resources in areas of greatest need across the
20 city. And we look at tree neighborhoods combined
21 with neighborhoods, park facilities that just haven't
22 had an investment in a significant number of years.
23 So that's some of the ways that we're able to really
24 look at making significant capital investments in
25 under resourced neighborhoods, parks and playgrounds

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2 across the city. So, we feel like you know there's
3 been significant investment in making sure that
4 through Community Parks initiative, through this most
5 recent funding to make sure that we can you know
6 deploy our capital equitably and across the city and
7 do it in a very thoughtful way.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: A quick clarification point,
9 is that capital money also, is it being controlled by
10 the different boroughs or how is that - no, okay, so
11 it's okay.

12 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yeah, yeah, so I mean what we
13 do, we work closely with our borough commissioners or
14 all park staff. First, we identify, we have a very
15 extensive data analysis portion that it looks at. It
16 deploys criteria, like what hasn't had an investment.
17 What park or playground hasn't been touched in a
18 certain number of years. What are the tree
19 neighborhoods that have been identified which are -
20 look at both resources, poverty level, COVID impacts
21 and really try and target those neighborhood with
22 this investment and uhm working with our borough
23 commissioners -

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

25

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2 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Working with our staff to really
3 make sure we're spreading those resources in the
4 areas of greatest need. And so, that is a very
5 significant way that we are addressing issues of
6 equity and capital restoration across the city.

7 And then in terms of your question and in terms
8 of PEP staffing, we did have 80 new PEP officers that
9 are baselined. We recognize that they have an
10 important role to play in terms of safety and
11 security and those PEP officers will be deployed and
12 are deployed today based on need, based on making
13 sure we have adequate coverage in our parks across
14 all the boroughs.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, thank you so much and
16 I definitely would love to see the - I'm glad to hear
17 that the borough commissioners are involved in that
18 because obviously they know the boroughs the best.
19 So, I appreciate that.

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Absolutely, yeah.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member Lee.
22 Chairs Brannan and Krishnan, that concludes
23 questioning. I did get some messages. There were
24 some CM's worried their names weren't called. They
25 were but to sooth minds, I'm going to call them one

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2 more time for everybody that was present. Council
3 Members Brannan, Brooks-Powers, Krishnan, Yeger,
4 Velázquez, Ung, Kagan, Ayala, Powers, Sanchez,
5 Salamanca, Ossé, Narcisse, Moya, Louis, Joseph,
6 Hudson, Farias, Dinowitz, Brewer, Barron, Restler,
7 Holden, Menin, Williams, Ariola and Lee. I'll turn
8 it back to the Chairs now.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Councilman Krishnan.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I just wanted to say thank
11 you to Chair Brannan. Thank you to all my
12 colleagues, all the Council Park staff to my staff at
13 my office as well. And a big thank you to
14 Commissioner Donoghue and all our Parks Department
15 representatives who are here today and all the great
16 work the Parks Department does every single day. We
17 heard today a lot of issues being discussed both for
18 the immediate term with our budget and for the long
19 term as well and we look forward to working and
20 negotiating with the administration in the home
21 stretch here to ensure that the parks budget does
22 reflect the crucial role that parks plays across our
23 city and look forward to continuing to advocate
24 together for more resources for our parks system to
25 speed up and address efficiencies where we need them

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2 and to make sure that every community has access in
3 the high quality green space that they all deserve.

4 So, thank you all so much.

5 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you, we appreciate the
6 support.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Commissioner, I appreciate
8 your time. I'd be remiss if I didn't shout out
9 Commissioner Marr. He is incredibly responsive.

10 Some weeks I think I speak to him more than I speak
11 to my own family. So, but he's great. I can't say
12 enough good things about him. I try not to bring up
13 local district stuff when we do these hearing and I
14 try to keep it citywide, but I would be remiss if I
15 didn't mention [INAUDIBLE 6:39:08] Park. It's a 77
16 acre gem of a park. It's really a regional park
17 that's in my district and I share it with Council
18 Member Kagan. You know one of the reasons why I
19 think a lot of my colleagues are so concerned about
20 the pace of the capital process is because we all
21 know that what something costs in 2010, it doesn't
22 cost now in 2022. In the case of [INAUDIBLE 6:39:35]
23 Park, 15 years ago, Mayor Bloomberg promised \$40
24 million to redo [INAUDIBLE 6:39:44] Park. It never
25 got done. The promise, he promised, he did a press

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2 conference the whole thing, the whole parade.

3 Nothing was done. I think they redid like one
4 basketball court and last time I checked in with
5 Parks, that same project 15 years later is looking at
6 \$100 million. So, I don't have \$100 million, right.
7 I couldn't take all my money for eight years and put
8 it towards one park. So, that is also part of the
9 problem too, is that the longer it takes for this
10 stuff to get done, the more expensive it is, the
11 longer it doesn't get done. And that's just a
12 reality that I know you understand and I just hope
13 that we can really work together and make some
14 progress on this.

15 I acknowledge that you're barely five months on
16 this job, less than probably three months right, so
17 we get that and we want to work with the
18 administration above all to fix this. I think the
19 database stuff, parks is great. Very responsive.
20 You know during COVID, they were doing, some of these
21 workers were doing the work of five workers and it
22 was one guy. You know it's crazy.

23 But I thank you for your time today. I know it
24 was a long hearing. You can see this Council cares
25 very much about the parks and we want to be partners

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2 in getting this right, so I appreciate it and with
3 that, I will adjourn this hearing. Thank you.

4 [GAVEL]

5 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Great, thank you all.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date June 30, 2022