

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND
RECREATION

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HELD AT: HYBRID HEARING, COMMITTEE ROOM,
CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Shekar Krishnan, Chairperson

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David M. Carr
Eric Dinowitz
Robert F. Holden
Linda Lee
Julie Menin
Francisco P. Moya
Mercedes Narcisse
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

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Jennifer Greenfeld
Deputy Commissioner
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Matt Malina
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Lucy Koteen
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Anna Theofilopoulou
Lower East Side Resident

John Plenge
Lower East Side Resident

Catherine Skopic
Vice Chair, Sierra Club, New York City
Group

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Testing 1-2-1-2. Good afternoon, and welcome to the hybrid hearing on Parks and Recreation. For council members and staff, please place all electronic devices to vibrate or silent. Testimony can be submitted to testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, there's testimony@council.nyc.gov. Chair we are ready to begin.

CHAIR KRISHNAN: Thank you, Sergeant. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining our hearing today before the council's Committee on Parks and Recreation. First, I would like to acknowledge my other colleagues who have joined us so far today, Councilmember Linda Lee, Councilmember Bob Holden. And many others joining virtually and will announce more as they come in. I'd like to first begin by reading an opening statement.

Good afternoon. My name is Shekar Krishnan. I'm the Chair of the Committee on Parks and Recreation in our New York City Council. I'd like to welcome everyone who has come to participate in today's hearing on a crucial topic: How we can better maintain and enhance our city's tree canopy. The benefits of well-maintained trees are obvious. They

improve water quality by filtering and diverting stormwater runoff, filter high frequency noises provide habitats for wildlife, mitigate the urban heat island effect, foster stronger connections with nature, keep the air cooler in warm weather, and provide better air quality by reducing the presence of many air pollutants. There are approximately 7 million trees in New York City representing a tree canopy that covers approximately 21% of the entire city.

The New York City Parks tree map has calculated some of the benefits that I mentioned before and found that for example, each year, trees were responsible for intercepting 1 billion gallons of storm water, conserving 649 million kilowatts per hour of energy, and removing 1 million pounds of air pollutants among many other benefits. The most recent decennial tree census completed by the Department of Parks and Recreation in 2016 determined there are approximately 666,134 street trees located on 131,000 City blocks.

The process involved in maintaining trees by the parks department has many facets. Briefly, the process includes a blocked by black pruning schedule,

engaging nonprofit organizations to help plant preserve and protect trees, and an inspection process to the Park Inspection Program or PIP, in which inspections on parks properties, including trees, are carried out routinely.

Over recent years, the department's budget for maintenance has suffered ups and downs, as the pruning cycle had to be increased from once every 7 years to once every 15 years and back once again to 7 years. With recent budgets, some of these funds have been restored, but issues still persist. For example, the four of the top five categories of parks-related 311 calls involve complaints about trees, including concerns over premature deaths to new trees, broken tree limbs, and sidewalk damage resulting from growing tree roots. Additionally, falling tree branches, many from trees that have been weakened due to severe weather, have raised serious concerns. Numerous incidents over the years have sadly occurred where severe injury and even death to bystanders resulted from being struck. This will be a major problem that needs to be addressed as climate change is going to leave the city more vulnerable to more severe weather and storms, and city trees, and

the benefits we derive from them will increasingly be at risk if we don't maintain them in a small way.

This all serves to highlight how crucial proper tree maintenance is to the quality of life and to the safety of all who live and visit the city.

At today's hearing, we will also examine how we can take significant steps to expand our tree canopy equitably to ensure more communities, especially those underserved communities, which have historically suffered from the lack of green space, and I've been particularly vulnerable to heat island dangers no longer have their environments neglected. In fact, studies have indicated that the urban forest is unevenly distributed, contributing to general inequity across communities. Generally, research shows that the most vulnerable communities, those with lower average incomes, higher proportions of people of color, and higher rankings on the heat vulnerability index, tend to have lower tree canopy. And this is something that, as Chair of the Committee on Parks, and all of us here in the parks committee, cared deeply about. When we think about green space, it isn't just about expanding green space. It's about doing so from an equitable standpoint, knowing

that certain communities, especially poor communities of color, have less tree canopy coverage, and as a result, are significantly hotter on average, especially in the summers than many other communities. If we are to address the climate crisis in our city, which we must do, then we must acknowledge these deep-seated inequities and work to reverse them.

In terms of where our cities trees are, the highest numbers of canopy cover is typically in areas with large parks and in neighborhoods that have lower population density levels. The lowest canopy cover was in heavily developed areas. According to data gathered by the Nature Conservancy, just over half of the canopy is managed by the parks department, which includes about 28% parkland, and 25% street trees and other rights of way. One third of the canopy is on private land, and the remaining 11% on land that is owned by various other government entities. Many advocates have been working for years on this issue. For example, the Forest For All Coalition has done extensive work in studying our urban forest to help policymakers at the city level and advocates alike on the best steps forward to protect and grow our tree

canopy. Some of those steps include goals to expand the canopy coverage to 30% by 2035. A crucial goal up from the current 22%, strengthening career pathways to jobs in urban forestry, developing a master plan to better coordinate care and maintenance of the urban forest, and increasing public investment in the care for city trees. The Forest For All Coalition comprised of over 50 advocacy organizations, nonprofit and government organizations and businesses, has argued that the city has not made the financial investment to keep its tree stock healthy, and a long-term vision is needed for its care. We must, as the coalition advocates, ensure that what's addressed is that trees are not equitably distributed throughout our city's neighborhoods, that trees are facing an increasing frequency of environmental threats, that too many trees are not protected from being cut down, that the city lacks a coordinated plan to care for the urban forest, and as I mentioned, the city should establish the city wide goal of increasing the tree canopy cover to 30%. These are just some of the aims of the Forest For All Coalition, which has done excellent advocacy work to protect our green spaces.

I certainly support these efforts and any effort that would increase tree plantings and other green space in areas that are lacking. In addition to trees being an issue of climate justice, of racial justice, it is also an issue of public safety. Data has shown over and over again, that investing in our trees, just like investing in our communities, is one of the most effective ways to keep our communities safe. In fact, recent reporting has shown that in the Ida B. Wells housing project on the south side of Chicago, the investments and trees had a direct correlation with increased public safety. Using aerial photos and police crime reports, researchers calculated that in the Ida B. Wells Projects, buildings still surrounded by lots of foliage saw 48% fewer property crimes on average, and 56% fewer violent crimes than buildings with low levels of vegetation. When we think about community safety, when we think about keeping investing in our neighborhoods, it means investing in everything, our green spaces and especially our trees. That is a core tenant of public safety in the way that I see it.

I would like to make sure that this hearing is a call to action but policymakers to get serious and treating our tree stock as crucial infrastructure investments that must be supported with the proper resources and equitably distributed to all parts of the city. Our residents across all communities deserve no less. And the well-being of our environment, our health, our safety, our climate for each and every New Yorker depends on it. Thank you very much, and welcome today's hearing.

I also note that we've been joined by council members, Marjorie Velázquez, Councilmember David Carr, and Councilmember Eric Dinowitz.

Now, before we start today's hearing and delve into the topic at issue, first I'd like to thank our Parks Department for being here, Commissioner Donaghue for addressing us today too. Since you're here and I know you're on a tight schedule as well, I'd like to take advantage of the opportunity before delving into today's topic, to ask a few questions about an issue of pressing attention right now in our city, which is the city's lifeguard shortage. This is an issue. (background voices) Oh right. I have to swear you in. The lawyer forget to swear the

witness in. Well, first before we start, I'm going to swear you in.

COUNSEL SARTORI: Thank you Chair Krishnan. I'm Chris Sartori. Counsel to the committee on Parks and Recreation. Before we begin, I'd like to remind everyone including members of the public who are testifying remotely that you will be on mute until you will call... you are called on to testify when you will be unmuted by the host. So please listen for your name to be called.

The first panelists to give testimony today will be from the Department of Parks and Recreation. Appearing today is Susan Donaghue, Commissioner of the Department, Jennifer Greenfeld, Deputy Commissioner for Environment and Planning, Matt Drury Director of Government Relations, and Ben Osborne, Chief of Forestry and Horticulture.

I will now administer the affirmation. So I will call on each of you individually for a response. So at this time, please raise your right hands. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth before this committee, and to respond honestly to council member questions. Commissioner Donaghue?

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

14

2 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: I do.

3 COUNSEL SARTORI: Thank you. Commissioner
4 Greenfeld?

5 COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: I do.

6 COUNSEL SARTORI: Thank you. Director Drury?

7 DIRECTOR DRURY: I do.

8 COUNSEL SARTORI: Thank you. And Chief Osborne?

9 CHIEF OSBORNE: Yes, I do.

10 COUNSEL SARTORI: Thank you. And now I will turn
11 it back to Chair Krishnan. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much, Chris.
13 Okay, now that we've got the oats out of the way,
14 we'll return to the hearing.

15 So as I mentioned, before delving into the topic
16 of today, Commissioner Donoghue, I want to thank you
17 for attending and given the short time that you have
18 use the opportunity to talk a bit about this pressing
19 issue we face regarding lifeguards and access to our
20 pools and beaches. This is obviously an issue that's
21 getting significant attention right now. Many have
22 raised issues about the lifeguards shortage and the
23 way that it's affecting safety and access to our
24 beaches and pools, and forcing the closure of various
25 swimming programs throughout our city. So I have a

few questions on that note. And my first one Commissioner Donoghue, is just to know a bit more about what exactly is the current lifeguard staffing level? How does it compare to prior years? And what is the reason for the decline over these years?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you, Chair Krishnan, and good afternoon. I'm pleased to be here and good afternoon to members of the committee. Thank you for your interest in and support for parks in general and on this important issue.

So as we all know enjoying our beaches and pools is really a classic summertime experience in New York City, and I am so proud of our employees at the Parks Department who worked tirelessly to make sure that millions of New Yorkers can enjoy safe, enjoyable and cool recreational experiences at times like this during the summer when temperatures rise. I am pleased to say all of our city beaches are open and as of today, we are also expecting to open all of our outdoor pools to New Yorkers next week.

However, despite our best efforts, and as the Chair said, there is no denying there are staffing levels today for our lifeguards that are significantly lower than any of us would like.

Similar to what the entire country is experiencing, it has been a challenging lifeguard recruitment season. It is tough to recruit enough people who can pass our lifeguard requirements, and the pandemic continues to impact recruitment as well.

This challenge as we know is it's not unique to lifeguards, nor is it limited to New York City. This is part of a national economic trend that is deeply impacting every corner of the service industry including air travel, hotels, restaurants, and retail as well as other economics actors. We are pleased to engage with the Council we want to discuss these challenges and also short and long-term solutions. But first and foremost, I have to acknowledge the tragic losses that have been suffered in recent weeks. And they are just a terrible reminder that we have to implore all New Yorkers, and with all of your help, I need the help to implore all New Yorkers to please, please use extreme caution and good judgment and only swim in locations that are properly supervised by lifeguards. To answer your question Chair Krishnan, typically pre COVID We would average a total of between 1400 and 1500 lifeguards every year for our outdoor pools and beaches. Right now we

have just over 560 certified, but with more certifications on the way. We do continue to certify new lifeguards up until July 4, and we're continuing to do that on a daily basis, and we do encourage you know any lifeguards who are out there that can come in and be certified, we're encouraging them to do so. But to answer your question right now, that number is 561.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: 561. And just to clarify, historically, in the past, it's been about 1400 to 1500 lifeguards.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Exactly. Between 1400 and 1500 lifeguards in 2020. Obviously with the pandemic we went down to 740 lifeguards. In 2021 we had just over 1000 lifeguards. So it has been a decreasing number over the last couple years.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. And as you noted, this is obviously an area of deep concern, and the impact that it has on access, again, are disproportionate across communities as well.

So given the situation that we face, you know, and as I assume there's a training process for lifeguards as well, has the Parks Department and this administration explored other avenues to increase the

number of lifeguards? You know, one... one thing that stands out to me, for example is lifeguard pay, on average is a lot less than other parts of the country. And, you know, there has been reporting on potential waivers or other ways to increase the capacity. So given this... given the issues of wages, given the potential for other areas as well, what solution is the Parks Department exploring to increase the number of lifeguards that we have for this summer?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: We are continuing to work with sister agencies and pursue all options. Lifeguard salaries and pay is not determined by the Parks Department. That is through negotiation between the Office of Labor Relations, and the unions, so we do not control pay. But we are working closely with you know other agencies and doing all we can including just encouraging and recruiting and trying to get as many who are already returning lifeguards to come back and recertify.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay, thank you. This is something obviously that is very important to me, to the Council, to the Parks Committee to and something that we're monitoring very carefully, and look

forward. I know we've had a number of conversations about the issue, and of different solutions, and the scope of the problem too, and this is something that, you know, we're many of us will be closely monitoring and keeping an eye on and I appreciate us being able to continue having our dialogue too with you directly and with all our parks in our offices to ensure we address this issue and ensure that we don't face this crisis again, too, because it is something that obviously is having an enormous impact right now on all of us as well. So thank you.

And you know, at this moment do I'd like to turn it over to Deputy Commissioner Greenfield for the opening statement.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you, Commissioner... Councilmember. If it's okay, I'm going to just do a quick introduction of Jennifer before we do that. But thank you and we will continue... I do so appreciate your support and the support of the Council and we will continue obviously to work closely on this important issue.

But turning over to the task at hand. I want to say good afternoon to members of the Parks Committee and other members of the city Council. I'm Sue

Donaghue, New York City Commissioner of Parks. I'm pleased to be joined today by Jennifer Greenfeld, our Deputy Commissioner for Environment and Planning, as well as our Director of Government Relations, Matt Drury.

I want to start by noting our extreme appreciation for the Council's continuing advocacy for our city parks, and for the resources and support it has provided for our forestry efforts. The Urban Canopy as you've noted already, Chair Krishnan, is one of the most vital resources of the city, and it's most vital to ensuring that our neighborhoods are healthy and thriving. It provides numerous measurable benefits across our five boroughs. And I am very proud of the work our parkies do every day to grow and protect our city's trees.

I'm very pleased to introduce to the Council our new Deputy Commissioner for Environment and Planning Jennifer Greenfeld. Some of you may know Deputy Commissioner Greenfeld from her previous role as Assistant Commissioner for Forestry, Horticulture and Natural Resources, and her leadership and years of experience at New York City Parks, protecting our city's trees and forests has been invaluable.

In addition to continuing to oversee our forestry, horticulture and Natural Resources team, DC Greenfeld will also oversee now our Planning Division, which leads the agency's long-term initiatives and land use procedures, and it's a reflection of the central and strategic role... important role that resiliency plays, natural resources and the environment plays within our agency and within our park system. We're delighted to have Jennifer take on this vital leadership role, and I will now turn it over to her for her testimony.

COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Thank you, Commissioner Donaghue, for those... the kind introduction. And thanks to the Council for convening today's hearing on this crucial, and I might say one of my favorite topics. My name is Jennifer Greenfeld, Deputy Commissioner for Environment and Planning at NYC Parks. I want to start by echoing the commissioner's appreciation for the Council's support for our urban tree canopy. Our trees provide a wide variety of benefits to our five boroughs, including improving human health and well-being, something I'm sure we can agree has been of utmost importance to New York City as it slowly recovers from the COVID-19

pandemic. In my testimony today I will characterize the portion of the New York City tree canopy that's managed by New York City Parks. I'll talk about this administration's work to expand and care for the urban forest, and provide a snapshot of some of our strong partners supporting the work

NYC's 42,656 acres of tree canopy is a full 22% of the city's land cover, and is best defined, as I... as you can imagine is the cover or the shade provided by the city's trees. We're excited to report that the city's canopy grew by 3,252 acres from 2010 to 2017. New York City Parks is responsible for just over half of the city's tree canopy as the Chair mentioned earlier, about 22,000 acres. Within that portfolio, NYC Parks manages 7300 acres of natural area forests, over 4 million trees, over 156,000 trees in in sort of the actively landscaped used areas of the park... of our parks, and over 666,000 trees that are growing along the street. The rest of New York City's canopy, that's 47%, grows on a combination of private and public land parcels such as residential front and backyards, NYCHA campuses, cemeteries, vacant land, and on public lands not managed by NYC Parks. This robust

urban forest provides an incredible array of environmental, social, and economic benefits, which you already heard about such as cleaning and cooling the air, reducing stormwater runoff, shading buildings, conserving energy by reducing heating and cooling costs, traffic calming protecting city pavement from rain and sun, noise mitigation, increasing property values and as I mentioned before human health and well being. Most of the trees under Parks's care are in natural forested areas. For over 35 years New York City Parks has characterized, monitored and actively managed the 7300 acres of natural areas forests. In fact, these woodlands spread across over 82 parks in every borough, play an outsized role in New York's effort to combat climate change. Forested natural areas make up a quarter of the total tree canopy in New York City but account for 83% of carbon sequestered of trees across the city. We know this and other facts about our natural areas, for example, that they are essentially healthy, dominated by native tree canopy, but still at risk from invasive species. We know all this through our partnership with the Natural Areas Conservancy. In 2018, NYC Parks worked in

partnership with NAC to develop the forest management framework to guide forest restoration management and public engagement. Thanks in large part to the generous support of the City Council through the annual Playfair funding, Parks has cared for 2200 acres of natural areas across 60 parks, including over 500 acres in areas that had not been cared for. In the past 10 years. We've planted 100,000 native trees, shrubs and herbs, producing much of this at our native plant nursery at the Greenbelt Native Plant Center and to accomplish all that we deployed a team of dedicated professionals. These incredible green job opportunities were all possible due to the support and funding that the city Council has provided for our forested and natural areas for three fiscal years, which we greatly appreciate.

So closer to home, the trees that grow in the actively used areas of our parks and the trees that line our city streets played a vital role in keeping New Yorkers cool and healthy. The latest Park and Tree Census tells us that this population is healthy, it's growing and it's diversifying over time. The trees along the streets are more and more spread out across every neighborhood, slowly reversing

historical disinvestment in underserved neighborhoods. This administration is investing in the further expansion of New York City street tree canopy, adding over \$136 million in tree planting funds over the next four years. That's the highest funding level for tree planting in over five years, allowing us to plant 20,000 Trees annually.

All New Yorkers deserve to enjoy the benefits provided by trees, so our planting programs take an equitable approach prioritizing neighborhoods suffering from extreme heat that have not been well served in the past, as well as planting trees were requested by local New Yorkers. As many of you are aware, in recent years, we have faced significant challenges represented by the highest cost of planting trees, very much in line with other increasing construction costs around the city. To address this Parks has introduced several new approaches, including bidding higher value and longer contracts to attract some of the larger construction companies, as well as smaller and geographically limited contracts to attract smaller vendors.

We're particularly optimistic and proud regarding our efforts to attract new MWBE contractors, and are

hopeful that these efforts along with the newly authorized ability to increase the value of MWBE special procurements will build upon these encouraging initial results, and allow us to deliver more value with taxpayer dollars.

As important as it is to plant new trees, it is equally important that we maintain our existing trees and preserve the vital benefits. The most marked increase in tree canopy actually comes from the natural growth of existing trees. In fact, our partners at The Nature Conservancy identified that up to 87% of that Canopy Growth that I talked about earlier between 2010 and 2017 was from the growth of existing trees not from planting new trees. So just as equity shapes our strategic approach to planting it is also central to our approach to caring for trees growing along our streets and in the active areas of our parks, such as playgrounds, sports fields, and picnic areas. In caring for our trees, we utilize a risk management approach to prioritize the conditions that present the most risk to New Yorkers and address those immediately. This involves a rigorous inspection program by some of the most qualified and credentialed foresters in the country,

accompanied by responsive in-house crews, along with contractors who focus on proactive maintenance, including pest and disease control, tree preservation during sidewalk repair, and neighborhood block pruning. Following some temporary COVID related reductions in FY 20, and 21, I am pleased to report that baseline levels of annual funding have been restored for our block pruning program, which will allow us to maintain a professionally recommended pruning cycle of seven years.

I also want to remind the Council of the great tools one of which Chair Krishnan mentioned already that we have to communicate information about the urban forest. These include the popular online tree map where you can learn about the tree on your street from which you can submit a service request. There's also the tree work hub that maps and lists exact address of planned and completed work, and in addition, the ever-expanding maps of formalized trail networks in Parks's natural areas. Just this June 4, In celebration of National Trails Day, we added four new trail maps online, including the extensive network in the Greenbelt, bringing our online maps to

21, making parks 300 miles of nature trails even more accessible to New Yorkers.

The success of our continuously improving canopy would not be possible without the diligent work of our numerous Park stewards and volunteer groups who generously donate their time and energy to looking after our trees. New York City Parks has worked hard to encourage a culture of caring for trees and actively involved New Yorkers in that process. Our stewardship team provides support for New Yorkers to care for street trees, natural areas, and trails. We have held almost 150 volunteer events for tree care last fiscal year. While helping to maintain the vulnerable resources, these events also provide a chance for residents to actively engage in the care of their city and to have fun and get a great workout while doing it.

And lastly, we again want to acknowledge the continued support of the Council, which has generously helped provide dedicated funding for tree guards, tree plantings, repairing sidewalks damaged by trees and stump removal. We also want to recognize the advocacy of the Forest For All Coalition and the Playfair Coalition, which led to

the funding which has contributed directly to the previously mentioned forest management framework and other important investments in tree planting and tree care.

I thank you for the opportunity to allow me to testify here today and I look forward to answering any questions you may have. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much, Deputy Commissioner Greenfeld.

Just a couple housekeeping items before we go into questions. We've also been joined by Councilmember Mercedes Narcisse, Councilmember Francisco Moya, and Councilmember Sandra Ung. So thank you all for joining us. One more thing I wanted to note as well, just to ask all my colleagues. You know, I wanted to take the opportunity while Commissioner Donaghue was here briefly to ask questions about the pressing issues of lifeguards, but the topic of today's hearing is on the tree canopy, and the witnesses here are here to testify about it. So I'd ask you all to please keep your questions focused to their areas of expertise, which is on the tree canopy and tree coverage in our city.

With that note, let's... let's get started.
Again, thank you, Deputy Commissioner for your
testimony.

My first question for you all is: What is
exactly the Department of Parks budget, current
allocation for overall tree maintenance for the
current fiscal year?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you very much for
that question. For tree maintenance, the budget is
around... almost \$27 million.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it. Okay. And that's
for the fiscal year ending...?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Starting this july.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Starting July 1st. Right.
Okay. \$27 million, right?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. And I want to point
out also, that this is the largest Parks Department
budget in the history of the city. So I am glad to
hear that more resources will be allocated towards
tree maintenance coverage as well. That was
something that was important to me to keep fighting
for to. Now, you know, I think similar questions go
towards understanding more the process of tree care

in our city. And so when it comes to pruning, how much pruning is done by Parks in-house versus using contractors?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you very much for that question. About 70-some percent of the pruning is done by contractors, the rest by our in house crews. And, give me one second, I know the number of trees that we've pruned over the year it's around 70... something of that number. I can get that to you the exact number.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure. It would be helpful to know. And I just wanted to revisit the question about the funding for tree maintenance. Is that... Does that include capital funding too? Or is that just expense side?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: No, that's expense side and includes pruning, removals, pest and disease control, and the sidewalks program?

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. And how much how much on the expense side... I mean, on the capital side?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: On the capital side?

So... Apologies, but you had asked about, about tree maintenance funds. So our tree maintenance funds are

all expensed. The capital funding is for tree planting, and there is in past years, we've had trees and sidewalks

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And how much, sorry, was... was budgeted for... for capital? I know I asked about maintenance. But also on the capital side, how much do we have this fiscal year for capital on trees?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: One second, let me find out. The tree planting is 40... Excuse me. Thank you for the question. It's \$44 million this fiscal year.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Now, numerous advocacy groups, as I mentioned, as you noted before, have called for the city to increase the tree canopy size to 30% by 2035 as an issue of keeping our city resilient, and also addressing the long standing disparities that we've seen in tree canopy coverage. Is that feasible? And has the Department of Parks and Recreation given thought, to how that goal or any increased canopy size can be reached? We'd love to hear from the agency on their perspective on this.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you very much for that question. And I... I do share our advocates,

you know, sort of concern and hope that we can increase the city's canopy. It's something that we are, you know, this administration is dedicated to. The mayor budgeted, you know, funding for us to be able to plant a full 20,000 trees every year for the next four years. So we're really excited to be able to do our part to increase tree canopy both by new tree planting and by caring for our trees.

And yes, we were actually quite engaged in the studies that the Nature Conservancy did. They... You all, I see, have a copy of the report. It's extremely well done and well researched. They took advantage of a lot of data that we've collected over time, with support by city funding for... to look at canopy across the board. And there is potential to increase canopy up to 30%. The timing is very aggressive. But there is absolutely that potential. And it's really a question of where it can go. And we're, of course, very focused on our... our sort of jurisdiction at parks. And... so just to give you an idea that about... hold on one second. So the current tree canopy cover in parkland is 47%, right? So while it is 22% across the city, if you just look at Parkland, it's 47%. And if you look at the right

of way, which is the other piece of it, the cover is 23%. So we have to think about what we have control over at the Parks Department. And there is definitely potential to increase canopy both within parkland and along the city streets. But it... we can't reach 30% without looking at the rest of the city land area. Because if you recall, New York City Parks is only actually 14%. And if you don't count land underwater, because you can't put trees on water, it's only 13% of the land cover. So in order to get to 30% coverage, you really need to have a very wide-ranging effort for both tree preservation and for planting.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And so just on that point, so how can we... how can Parks work to achieve that goal? There's some things that are under the jurisdiction of Parks, the other pieces that may not be, but they obviously affect the overall comprehensive vision that's crucial for us to achieve. Are there strategies that Parks has considered about how to address that overall?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you for that question. We absolutely think about it. We think about it all the time. When you look at the increase

between 2010 and 2017, the greatest amount of increase that you saw in that sort of added canopy was actually in the public right of way. And we believe that's because we've... we have done such a good job at both planting new trees and protecting the ones we have. And we'll continue to do that through our tree maintenance programs, through protection, the trees and sidewalk program is an important way of saving some of our larger trees, and those larger trees are the ones that have the greatest benefits.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Now, you know, one thing that I've mentioned, as well and really is a focus of this committee too, is the equitable distribution of our tree canopy, and making sure that, you know, we are looking at... looking at it through that lens, looking at our most heat vulnerable communities, making sure they receive their fair share of environmental benefits that larger tree numbers provide. And I just wanted to go through two charts, or maps of data that our Park... Council Parks Committee staff put together that are just very... powerfully convey the how these how these inequities play out. And so I don't know if it's... if it's on

the screen here, but I'll do my best to describe it as well.

The first chart is about canopy cover and heat in NYC, comparing the percentage of canopy coverage and daytime summer surface temperature for every neighborhood. And what you see is that you know looking at a scatterplot here with the x axis being median canopy coverage... and right... so median canopy coverage and where that stands compared to... on the Y axis of temperature. You see all the different neighborhoods and areas and how they compare to the median both in terms of canopy coverage, and the median in terms of temperature in our city. And so I want to call attention to Elmhurst and Jackson Heights in particular, my district, for example. As I mentioned before, we ranked 50 out of 51 Council districts when it comes to park space per capita in our city. But you can also see in the top left quadrant, Elmhurst and Jackson Heights are just two examples of neighborhoods that have below-average canopy coverage as well as above average median temperatures. And so, you know, it's you can all go through your neighborhoods and we'll make sure to put this data on

the Council website as we did for our last hearing, but it really powerfully can convey this relationship between canopy coverage and surface temperatures in our neighborhoods. We've read reports. The New York Times did an excellent report last year about surface temperatures in the South Bronx, for example, versus surface temperatures on the Upper West Side, given the disparities and tree canopy coverage too. And so you really do see the direct causation between increased or lack of canopy coverage and what that means for... for temperatures on the ground, especially for poor countries of color.

So I would like to know what efforts has the Parks Department considered to ensure that any increase in canopy size results in an equitable distribution of trees and addresses this challenge head on?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Sure. Thank you for that question. And I certainly share your concern. Equity is an extremely important part of this administration. And we are always thinking about how we can do the best job and a better job at providing our services equitably across the city. And we're

very familiar with the... with the patterns of canopy. And again, we you know, really can look at the piece of the puzzle that we have management over, right? So it's the public right of way and it's parkland. And a lot of the rest of the canopy is... is really driven by land use decisions, historic disinvestment, and in fact, biological considerations. For example, you... It's very hard to establish great canopy cover in coastal areas where they weren't historically, didn't have trees right there, scrub shrubs, sort of neighborhoods, beaches. So some of those things sort of automatically limit. You're never going to get a huge amount of canopy in midtown Manhattan, in really dense downtown neighborhoods, which also unfortunately, in some ways, you have to be extremely creative in places like flushing, or in downtown Brooklyn. And in fact, the past Councilmember Khuu was very generous and gave us some funding to really try some very inventive ways of accommodating trees and very tough growing neighborhoods. And we're going to be doing that. And maybe we'll learn something about getting more trees into some of these neighborhoods that are very limited. In terms of

what we typically do... Oh, and I'll just say one other thing: Is that we're very well aware of the... the inequity, because what we do is we also look at where service requests come from. And historically, the city had for a very long time planted trees only where people requested them. And when you map those requests, you see why. You know, one reason we have this inequitable distribution. So we knew we had to do something about that we couldn't just wait for people to request trees. It's not always top of mind for every New Yorker. And so our approach now is to look at neighborhoods with high heat. We use the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, sort of way of identifying neighborhoods with high heat vulnerability. They have an index, which you're probably familiar with. It's based on residents receiving public assistance. So it's not just about heat. It's looking at social and economic factors, percentage of non-Hispanic black residents, average surface temperatures, so that is part of it, and also the percentage of households with air conditioning.

So they take those... This is, again, not the Parks Department, these are the experts in public health. They take that information, they've mapped

the city, based on this information. Each neighborhood has a ranking from one to five, with five being the highest vulnerable... most vulnerable neighborhoods. And so we start with five, and that's where we are. It's called HVI, the Heat Vulnerability Index. And so all the neighborhoods under HVI 5 are where we're targeting our discretionary funds. So not things that are like a Councilmember gives us for your district, though we always go into your district. But the discretionary funds first go to these HVI 5 neighborhoods. And now with the new funding that we've... we've just received, we'll be able to reach through all of HVI 4 neighborhoods as well.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. And one also map I wanted to point out as well, and I'll describe it again visually, too. Unfortunately, we didn't have a color printer in our office to print it out. But we'll put that on the website, and it'll be in color too.

But what it does show, similar is the data that was on the the scatterplot before too, is the map of the city and the neighborhoods were in red, that have higher than average temperatures, and their outline.

The ones in black that are outlined are in the bottom 25% for park access. So what you see is across the city, neighborhoods that are on the bottom 25% for park access, what you'd see on the map is that they're the darkest red, in other words, neighborhoods like Jackson Heights or Elmhurst, or communities like ours that lack green space, have much higher temperatures, too. And so, you know, however you look at the data, it's clear where the need is. One question I have is, what areas of the city have seen the largest increase in canopy coverage recently? Or what neighborhoods?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you for that question. And it's... it's like a perfect leading question for me, because the largest increases in canopy cover are actually those same neighborhoods, because we really have been concentrating planting in those neighborhoods of need for a while, but you don't see the canopy increase, you have the stems increased, right. But it takes a while for the trees to catch up and to fill out, and that that takes a little bit of time. So the biggest increase are areas like Central Brooklyn and sort of the... the Brooklyn, Queens border area, South Bronx, Upper

Manhattan, East Harlem. Those are the areas that you saw the most increase in canopy cover and street tree numbers too.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And does Parks track the reasons for why a specific area might have suffered canopy loss?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you for that question. We are always aware of it. I can't say that we track it directly. So I'm sitting with these maps in front of me that are in your... in your book there that you have where, you know, we're looking at tree planting... I mean, sorry... canopy distribution and change. And so when you look at that, and you're welcome to look at it from page 29, I think... So yeah, we looked at this map when we worked with the Nature Conservancy, and we're like, "What's going on in those yellow places?" Those are where you had the most loss over time. That's where our concerns are. And some of them are like, "Oh, right, remember the tornado that came through? Straight down the center from sort of Northeast Queens down through Brooklyn?" You see that. You see the loss in some of those neighborhoods, particularly in Queens because it wasn't as strong

and Brooklyn. Remember Sandy? That's where all the loss is around Jamaica Bay in Southern Queens. So we do know that. We know why there's been loss in a lot of these places. Do we track it neighborhood by neighborhood street by street? It's difficult to do that because there's so many factors, but when you look at the trends, we know what's going on.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And the city has zoned a few areas in the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island as special natural area districts where restrictions on privately owned trees are enforced. Has the department along with other agencies consider the benefits of expanding SNAD type restrictions in other areas of the city to really make sure trees are protected?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you for that question. So you... you may know we the SNAD program is managed and by the Department of City Planning, so I'll just have to defer to our colleagues at the Department of City Planning to provide information on the potential for either expanding or strengthening the SNAD regulations. They don't apply to city parks. So it's really within the Department of City Planning's sort of jurisdiction

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And what requirements and qualifications apply to tree maintenance contractors? For example, are they required to be certified arborists?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you for that question. They are required to have a certified arborist supervise the crews. They have to have an accreditation by the tree care industry association, which is essentially an accreditation that demonstrates their commitment to safety. They have to have electrical hazard awareness training to work near wires, and they have to have at least three years of experience at the type of work that they will be asked that they will need to do.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And how many arborists does NYC Parks have on staff as employees of the Parks Department?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you. So just one clarification: Arborist isn't actually a city's civil service title. So... so I can tell you we have 40... We have about 70 some in the forester title people, and 116 in the climbers and pruner title. Now of all of that group of people, plus some more, there are 97 certified arborists, and there are 80

people who are tree-risk assessors, or track qualified. So I gave you a little bit about their civil service title and their... their credentials. And the International Society of Arboriculture is very protective over their information. They're the credentialing group. But I can pretty much tell you I don't think there's another city that has that many people working for them who are certified arborists and track qualified.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And one thing we spoke about before was how... I think the stat was 4 out of the top five 311 complaints were about trees. So how are... And that was an interesting fact to me, but a very significant one. So how are 311 complaints regarding trees treated? If a tree was just pruned two years ago? Does the complaint have to wait until the next pruning cycle to be addressed?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you for that question. We... Absolutely, you know, making sure we respond to requests that really present a risk to the public is very important to us. And the things that we look for... The direct answer is no. We look at each individual service request for what it... what that service request is telling us. We're looking

for keywords like hanging limb, trees down, split wood, blocking traffic signs, leaning. So it doesn't matter when we looked at your tree before, or if it was block pruned on a regular pruning cycle. If that one of those keywords is there, we're going out to inspect that tree?

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And is... Backing up for a second, because I do feel like this is something that, you know, it comes up a lot, which is: What is the cycle overall for addressing trees and tree maintenance? You know, many of us have seen that it can take a very long time, that there is a categorization system that Parks Department uses for tree. So I love people to speak a little bit about, you know, what the... what the cycle is and why it is that way.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Sure. Thank you for that question. Obviously, we take tree maintenance very seriously. And... and the absolute priority is risk and safety for the public. So the way I look at it is that we have a system of care inspection and responding to requests and work and they're multi-layered. And not everything on... each one on its own doesn't do the full job. So yes, we have a seven

year pruning cycle. And yes, it's true that that some trees need attention in less than seven years. And that's why we do other things in addition, we have... we have... Anybody... Somebody's... Any time, we pick up service requests and conditions, as we're driving around, create inspections and work orders. We take service requests all the time. And as I said before, you don't have to wait for the next cycle for us to inspect it. We have supervisors in our parks looking at trees, we have the inspection program which you mentioned, they're all looking at trees. And all of this is sort of feeding this information to our professional staff, to then decide to inspect the trees and then determine the level of risk that they pose to the public. And it's a very quantifiable process we've adapted from the International Society of Arboriculture, from ISA, a tree risk management program that helps us sort of triage and determine which ones we need to get to the fastest with the with the best resources we have.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And is there currently a backlog of tree complaints that need to be addressed?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: There are... Thank you for that question. Let me just give you a sense of

what we look at every year. Not counting tree planting requests we receive on average -- this is sort of a five year average -- 80,000 service requests a year for trees. We inspect 111,000 trees every year, and these are all kinds of inspections by qualified inspectors, and we complete almost 100,000 work orders a year. It's a huge volume that is constantly coming in, and going out, and being acted on. Some we do determine has to wait for the block pruning cycle, and some we know needs to be addressed right away. And that's really the expertise of our in-house crews.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Did the latest tree census count the number of dead trees? If so how does that number compare with the recent years?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you for that question. So the tree census, as you say is the... is... as you know, is like... it's like the US population census. And it's a great snapshot in time. And that's the number I always like to use. At that time we identified about 2% of the street tree population was dead... was standing dead. And that's about 13,000 trees. It's not an unusual number for a population. And I wouldn't... I... And

we don't have an exact number at this moment in time. So it's just like the census you're not going to... I can't tell you how many people live in between in your neighborhood because it's always a moving target. And if you... Yeah, I think that's the best way to look at it. So at the time, which was at the end of 2016, we had 13,000 trees that were dead.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: You know, I think that that's one of the things that comes up a bunch in our communities too, is that when there are dead trees, to ensure that we're able to get them addressed and taken care of as quickly as possible.

Does the Parks Department engage various communities when deciding what the optimal locations are for the types of trees that are planted? You know, I've personally worked with constituents too where their trees that go in, that we actually wanted other ones in there and other kinds of plantings. And so ensuring that we've got a really good and tight-knit community process so that we know... communities can express what they know to be... and especially in my district, for example, we've got some really good advocacy groups that are part of the Forest For All Coalition that focus on trees, like

the Jackson Heights Beautification Group and others. How do we ensure that the local expertise and perspective on the locations and the types of trees that are planted is accounted for in the process when DPR decides what trees and where to plant them?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Sure, thank you very much for that question, and we definitely appreciate the attention that communities pay to our trees. We can't be the eyes and ears -- well, really eyes as they're not really talking to us -- for every single tree in the city. So we really welcome people's participation. And anytime somebody submits a service request for a tree they can suggest a species for us to consider, tell us what they want. So in that way, an individual request, we absolutely take that into account. So there are... there are also a number of considerations that we're looking at as foresters identifying and matching the tree to the location. First and foremost, we want that tree to survive. So you have to pick a tree. And this is based on data and our experience we've done we track the mortality of our trees, we know what lives and what doesn't live, in which circumstance. So you've got to choose a tree that will you know, will live.

The second thing we do is we choose the tree that will provide the most ecological benefits. And the bigger the tree in... when it's mature, the better... it the more services it provides, right?, the more shade. And so that's the second thing we look at. We look at... We pick the biggest tree that's appropriate for that space. We don't plant large trees under wires. We look at how narrow the space is. It's all about the space. And then we have to think of the ecological sort of conditions. Like I said: In coastal areas, some things are not going to live no matter how much somebody wants to see that species of tree, and that's sort of where the community participation comes in, where we appreciate it, but we know it's not going to live and we can't plant that tree there. And in fact, we've come up with a whole new way of looking at how, particularly... in particular, how to select species in coastal areas. So you have that, and you have to look at the design. So you have an LA... you know, a median with all cherry trees, we're going to try to replace it, so the design is... still maintain some cohesive... cohesiveness.

And then the other thing that we look at that again, as much as we do appreciate community input, is we have to look at the entire urban forest. And we really have to think about how we can diversify the species across the board. And sometimes that means we know what's going on in that community, or we know what's going on in a neighboring neighborhood. And we... we just have to limit some species that are very, very popular, because we don't want to end up in a situation like we did years ago in the 30s with Dutch elm disease where we really lost a significant population of our of our... of trees in cities.

So... And there's one more thing I was going to mention is that in terms of species, one improvement that we have made is that we used to be subject to market conditions. So that often is something that limits. Like, what can you find in the nursery? And it's been about, I don't know, 10 or 15 years now that we've had contracts directly with the growers, so we really have a lot more influence on what... They grow what we tell them to grow. And so we're not as constrained on that.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I always encourage Park to keep communicating... communicating more closely with neighborhoods too, so that we can... we make sure that what's planted before it's planted, also reflects that local input as well. I encourage you to keep thinking of new ways to do so and to reach out as well.

I... I've got a couple more questions, but I'm actually going to turn it over to my colleagues first, and I'll come back on a second round for those.

But before getting started on my colleagues questions, I just want to also recognize that we've been joined by Councilmember Lincoln Restler and Minority Leader Joe Borelli.

And on that note, I'll turn it over to my colleagues ask questions. We can start with Councilmember Holden.

COUNCILMEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Commissioner. Welcome. Thank you for your testimony. And you know, just for somebody who's been around in civic life and working with Parks for... since the 1980s, I've always felt that Parks is their own worst enemy in planting trees, and

I'm going to tell you why. You mentioned one of them: Where in the 80s and early 90s, I had to do... we had to have homeowners fill out a form if they wanted a tree in front of their home. And if they didn't want it, it wasn't planted. And I always was against that. I said, "This is not their land, by the way. It's... it's the city's." The space and the strip at the curb is the city's space. And it's and it's really for future generations too, where, you know, when we plant a tree, it's for the next homeowner on that block, or residents in the future, otherwise, we wouldn't get anywhere. So we did have residents... and the Parks Department kind of followed that until sometime in the mid-90s, when I said you know, "that's enough, I'm going to survey and put in requests, even if I have to do it for my organization for that particular property." And we got hundreds of trees planted. However, they didn't plant them correctly. They... they boxed them into smaller spaces, and then they bricked... In front of my house, they planted a nice, beautiful, flowering pear, and then just put cobblestones around the whole thing and it couldn't get water. So I would go... I would have to water the heck out of it to get any

water in there. In hindsight, I should have picked it up, but it died within four years. And it's been dead for four years. And I still have a stump in the ground that I can't get removed as a Councilmember. It's unbelievable.

Homeowners face the same thing. In fact, it's going to be double the wait. I have tree stumps everywhere. So whatever we're doing with trees, historically, we've failed in the city of New York. We planted trees where they shouldn't have been planted, or they should have had more space, they should have had more ground... soil rather than boxing them in. And we planted the wrong ones often too. So I just don't get it, why we keep making these same mistakes? I see it's better now. And maybe that's, you know, to you, or a testament to the parks, whatever. They figured it out a little bit better.

But then I asked the previous Commissioner, I said, "I have spaces that requires smaller trees because they're smaller footprints. And so couldn't we plant... Don't have a program that we could plant smaller trees that won't grow that large, but they would look nice, and they would offer people..."

2 People love trees. I mean, most people do. And I've
3 seen... I haven't really gotten a definitive answer
4 on that. But I do think that it has to do with the
5 price of trees, because we've gotten... we've
6 gotten... it's gotten out of hand, and the price to
7 plant one particular tree I think it was \$3600 at one
8 point. I don't know if it's... if it's still that.
9 What was that? Yeah, is it \$3600?

10 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: That's the average.

11 COUNCILMEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah. So that's
12 outrageous. And so that's why I brought it up to the
13 Commissioner, that... let's do a pilot program. And
14 I think you're considering it, where it's done in
15 house, that we could hire more people in parks, that,
16 you know, the 1% would be a great idea that... You
17 know, that's what we wanted. We didn't get it, but
18 you know, we need to get it. And if we hired people
19 to plant trees, and gave them a salary, gave them
20 benefits and you know, they could maintain it. They
21 don't have to... they're not going to plant trees
22 year round, so they could maintain the trees in the
23 off-season when they can't plant.

24 So it's it seems like a viable... Rather than
25 getting this this extorted price of \$3600 to plant

each tree and then it still doesn't... and we still don't maintain the ones we have. Because we had a recent windy day in my district and I lost dozens of trees and... to the form of like they're split in half. And every tree that comes down... or every part of the tree that comes down, you can see rot inside. And I had microbursts in my neighborhood because, we're 100 feet above sea level in my district, most of the district. We've had storms. We've had... We had everything. I had tornadoes years ago that we... You know, a microburst is a downward tornado, and we lost 1000s of trees then, and we never recovered.

And again, if my neighborhood is going to put on the end of the list, because we do have a decent tree canopy, it's just... We're going to spin our wheels. So I'm putting extra money into my budget to try to get the tree stumps removed, try to get the trees pruned. But if you go into Juniper Valley Park right now you'll see a tree that was cut in half by just a windy day. And you can see the tree was lopsided. You can see it should have been pruned. And I think... in parks especially in where people a lot of people congregate and a lot of people use we need to

give that a priority to... to prune those trees because they can kill people. They have killed people in the past when they come down.

So sorry... one second. The trees that we're seeing, that we really can't take care... So planting 20,000 trees is... is a drop in the bucket, I think, in a particular year, considering all the storms we've had in the city of New York, so I would. Again, we have to fight to get more money for the trees, but we really have to do a better job in taking care of the ones we have also. Thank you. Thank you Chair.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Next, we've got Minority Leader Borelli.

MINORITY LEADER BORELLI: Can you say again how much it cost to plant a tree?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Sorry. Citywide, it's \$3,600. In Staten Island, the average is considerably less. I'll get that for you.

MINORITY LEADER BORELLI: Do you know how much it costs to plant a tree by the city of Jersey City just across the Hudson River?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: No, please.

2 MINORITY LEADER BORELLI: You want to take a
3 guess?

4 [laughter]

5 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: No. I'll let you Thank
6 you.

7 MINORITY LEADER BORELLI: It costs \$500.
8 According to their 2018 Guide, they estimate their
9 cost per tree which is passed on to homeowners in
10 Jersey City, \$500 per tree. That's a three inch
11 caliper tree, a standard one that we use.

12 Has there been any effort to see what other
13 cities are doing in terms of tree planting, in terms
14 of perhaps saving both homeowners and the city
15 itself? Because correct me if I'm wrong, but we...
16 we talked about the price of capital projects, we
17 talked about delays, and stuff like that the tree
18 restitution cost is often borne by the agency
19 themselves. So has there been any effort to look and
20 see what other cities are doing?

21 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you for that
22 question. And I... I know it's... We really do share
23 your concern for the cost of trees. I also wish it
24 would cost less. We don't want to be spending more
25 than we need to. And yes, you are correct, we have

to follow prevailing wages, as well as a host of other regulations in terms of how we contract out our... our tree work... our street tree planting... all of our tree planting work. And yes, we've been exploring a lot of other things.

The most promising piece that we've seen... And by the way, I would be happy to directly talk to Jersey City. I don't know if we've talked to them directly about it. But one of our most promising things that we piloted this year is a new kind of... the tree grown in a different way. Typically we grow up we plant the trees balled and burlapped, you know, the big wire baskets. And there's a newish... what's it called... a newish technology where the trees are grown in these bags, they're called grow bags, and and they are lighter weight. So that means they you don't need the same amount of equipment to move them around. You can fit more on the truck. So that means you have fewer things to... to... you know you can do more in a day, for example. And we piloted that this year. We did it in a bunch of different... (crosstalk)

MINORITY LEADER BORELLI: Big picture.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Sorry, yeah.

MINORITY LEADER BORELLI: Can you think of anything else that the Parks Department -- or my other friends on the panel who have lengthy experience in government -- can you think of anything else that we pay seven times the amount that the same service... And by the way, this is the same service. I read the entire 50-page guide from the Jersey City. It has the diagrams. I actually think they copied our guide. But then I did some more research and I realized that all comes from that national standard appendix of Tree Bible. Great.

Can we think of any other example where New York City pays seven times the amount that an adjacent municipality pays for a service?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: It's not... it's not an expertise of mine. I'm not aware.

MINORITY LEADER BORELLI: I can't think of any. Can Jersey City plant our trees?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Excuse me? I'm sorry. I didn't hear.

MINORITY LEADER BORELLI: Can Jersey City plant our... I'm not even joking. Can... Can Jersey City... Can we contract Jersey City to plant our trees? Give them the \$20 toll? And is it possible?

2 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: It's a good question.

3 (crosstalk)

4 MINORITY LEADER BORELLI: Can they respond to an
5 RFP, I guess is the question.

6 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: I think some of our
7 contractors do come from New Jersey.

8 MINORITY LEADER BORELLI: Okay. I mean, at
9 \$3,600, can I sell you my backyard tree for \$1800?
10 Okay. Now I'm kidding. I'm kidding. I'm sorry to
11 be a bit tongue-in-cheek, but the cost of replacing
12 all 666,134 street trees that would be under the
13 city's jurisdiction in full is \$2.4 billion. And
14 that's a cost that we'll have to bear in 2021
15 dollars... 2022 dollars, I forget what year it is.
16 Obviously, we're not going to come anywhere close to
17 that because we're only replanting, I think you said
18 about 20,000 per year. I guess my point is: Do you
19 see the bigger picture in that if the cost of
20 replacing these... these trees was lower, or we had
21 better contractors, or we did it in house, or we did
22 it through volunteer programs, or we made it a little
23 bit simpler for people to plant a tree on their own.
24 Because one of the complaints I've gotten from just
25 home builders is that when they plant a tree and a

single twig is broken, the tree police come and they give them thousands of dollars in violations.

I think all of these things collectively add up to our problem. And the cost is a major part of that problem. And if the cost was lower, we'd have a better tree policy overall. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Minority Leader. Before we go to next question, I wanted to point out to everyone to all my colleagues that we've got two books here as well by the Nature Conservancy, and supported by the Forest For All Coalition about the urban forest agenda. I encourage you all to... to look through it too, as it has some really important information and data about the importance of our tree canopy and expanding tree canopy coverage, especially in communities that need it. So just wanted to mention that.

I also mention that we've been joined by Councilmember Julie Menin as well. And now our next set of questions are by Councilmember Narcisse.

COUNCILMEMBER NARCISSE: Good afternoon. Thank you for being here. And I want to say thank you to the Commissioner, Sue Donaghue. She's a very beautiful person. We spent some time together. And

I have to let you know that you're in a friendly territory. Because when I'm with the City Councilmembers, all my colleagues, all we talk about this is the trees. And I have to let you know that I'm from Canarsie area, where Sandy devastated all our trees. I used to live in a tree lined street. Now it's not. We can barely see a tree.

It's difficult for me... Like my colleagues, we were talking, I was thinking about the cost, because you have to be cost effective and responsible for the taxpayers. And I have \$35... now I'm hearing . Now I'm here in \$36 per tree, because I had \$35. Maybe I saw it somewhere. It's \$35. I had... I don't know where, but I think I read it somewhere. But anyway, besides the point. It's still a lot of money. But when you're talking about wages, I hope it goes to black and brown communities, so we can bring some equity to the city.

But having said that, if we plant the trees, and.... for that price, and it dies, I mean one out of two... I'm saying one... it's two... probably out of... no... one out of 10 of the new trees are dying. What can we do to make sure that if we spend that much money, our trees are not dying? What can the

community do to support? Like, let's say I have a tree in front of my house after you planted? Are we giving information to those folks to know how to keep the tree? Because we love trees. Third, I think the homeowner... we need to improve the mortality, definitely, because we cannot pay that much money. And I have heard you say that, um, you have to pick trees that can live for a long life... that have long life. I can understand that too. So any other question that I have? I think some of them already asked by my colleagues. But I have to let you know that we work hard, and we still want that \$1 billion, because we need the environment equity we're talking about, because what happened during the height of the pandemic's that we realized a lot of folks did not have backyard, did not have a place to go, and our park become the catering Hall, the kids playing. So we appreciate it. So keep on doing the good job, but we have to improve in terms of the money, the tax dollars that we're spending. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you very much. Councilmember Narcisse. And thank you so much for your support, for trees and nice to know that we're in friendly territory. I appreciate your support.

And I believe one question you asked was about what to do if you... if... when you see a newly planted tree that's not surviving, and those trees are under guarantee, so as soon as you see it, we really encourage you to call 311 and report it so then we can make sure that the contractor is held responsible. We do also inspect everything before they're let off the hook for the guarantee. But please let us know if we... if you see it, so we can get the contractor to replace it in in you know it would be in the next planting season.

COUNCILMEMBER NARCISSE: So that's what we can do to increase, you know, the life hold of the trees that we love so much, to keep up...?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Exactly. For the newer trees that are planted. Yes.

COUNCILMEMBER NARCISSE: So I appreciate you. So let's continue planting the trees. So, what can we do right now in the areas that used to have trees but with Sandy, we lost those trees. What can we do to get the trees back?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Yeah, thank you for that question. We'll take a look, we'll see what our plans are in your neighborhood and let you know, to

see how we're approaching planting in that neighborhood.

COUNCILMEMBER NARCISSE: I guess for now, if I forget, then maybe I'll have a chance to come back. But for now, thank you so much. Appreciate it.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Councilmember Narcisse. Our next set of questions is by Councilmember Dinowitz.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you. First of all, I want to be the first to say it. Parks should have 2% of the city budget. I'm going to be the first to say it. And we're going to work to that.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: That's how we move the goalposts.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: That's right. I want... First, I want to thank you for coming. You know, I always say Parks is one of my favorite agencies. You know, with... the reality is your budget is not enough. And with that, I know at least with my office, you are very responsive. Everyone loves our parks. Our parks are for everyone. And you know, Council... Chair Krishnan outlined the importance of our parks, of our tree canopy. I want to go back to

something you were talking about, which is the heat, the temperature, because I agree we should be planting trees based on where they're needed. It is not always the case that, you know, people who in neighborhoods with... with high heat index indexes are going to call 311 and request the trees to the same extent as other neighborhoods.

So I looked at the map of where the trees have been planted, and where they're going to be planted. The Bronx: So I want to talk about the Bronx because that's where I represent. My neighborhoods of Woodlawn, Wakefield, Norwood, and Bedford Park, according to the city website are rated four out of five for the heat index, which is almost the worst that could be. And so when I looked at the map, what I noticed that there are a lot of orange circles. And what that means is that trees are planned to be planted there. And what it says is "planned to be done by May 31 2022", which is past. So... So I just want to highlight that, that I don't know if I'm asking first about keeping to this schedule.

But the second thing is about that equity, because I looked at other parts of the map. And there... and while I have a lot of orange circles,

there are a lot of green circles in other boroughs where their heat index number is three, or two, or one. And so while I value and appreciate talking about planting trees when they're needed, it doesn't appear, based on your data, that that is the work that is being done. The work does not reflect that value that I think we both share. So what is the... what is the status of getting more trees in the three neighborhoods I mentioned? But of course, other neighborhoods that are fours and fives? What is the timeline for planting trees? And one thing I would suggest that your website does not show is: If a request was made, when the request was made, because that would give us in in public office a better understanding of the timeline of things.

And I would just... I'll ask.. I'll front-load all my questions if you don't mind. Tree stumps. Are we talking about tree stumps? I know no lifeguards, but we could talk about tree stumps. Same thing about the map: There were requests that my office made on Bailey Avenue specifically. And they don't appear even on the map. And this was a request made multiple times a year ago, roughly a year ago. So between the... So if you could first

address the... the issue with planting trees and the high heat index areas, and then we'll talk about tree stumps, please.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Sure.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you very much for your question. I appreciate the attention to trees and your support for... for trees and parks.

Okay, let's see if I can start with the planting. What you see on the tree... not the tree map. I know the tree work hub. So I did mention that the two main ways we plant trees are based on the HVI program, the equity program, and request. But there's actually another... And I also mentioned electeds, who give us specific planting for their... their neighborhoods. There's actually another sort of category of tree planting that we do, and those are... that's planting that's required through sort of legal requirements. So as you know, there's tree replacement laws, and so we... people have the ability to either plant or pay the Parks Department to plant, so those trees we plant and it doesn't matter whether they're in HVI or not. We plant them where the tree was removed, as well as trees for new

buildings, right? So for part of zoning you're required to plant trees, and you could choose to plant them or you could choose to pay us to, and again we plant where that building was built, not... regardless of where it is. So you may be seeing that pattern, and we're happy to kind of give you an idea of how it breaks down. But that's not money that's allocated by the city government. That comes in for a very specific reason from the private sector. And we have restrictions of where we can plant those trees.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: So when I... in 13 seconds.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Sorry, I know there's another question.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Well, it was the tree stumps. But I just... but again, what I'm happy to do is follow up with your office. Because just looking at the map, it's hard to imagine that in areas with heat indexes of one, two, and three, that there's just so much new development and so much legally required tree replacements, that it would totally overshadow the fact that it's pretty much only orange in Wakefield, not a ton in Norwood to

begin with, but a bunch of orange there. So I'd love to love to follow up about the details of that. And I see the face like, "oh, no, you'd be surprised how many tree replacements", but I want to be respectful of time. And if you could just help adjust the tree stump issue. That that's... You know, we had like 312 pending tree stump removals, and the four that I asked for are not on the map.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Not on the map. Will do. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Councilmember. Now Councilmember Restler.

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Wonderful. Well, Deputy Commissioner, let me congratulate you on your promotion. I had the good fortune of listening to you on Brian Lehrer some months ago and was very impressed. That was a fun series. And it's always good to see you, Matt. So thank you all for everything you do.

Look, I love trees, as I imagine all of us up here do, and as ardent a proponent as I possibly can for us to have more of them. I think we all understand the myriad benefits around the heat... around addressing extreme heat, around resiliency,

around air pollution, around just combating the climate crisis altogether, nothing is more important than... than us planting more trees.

The problem I have is that every time I call the Parks Department, I'm told why I can't plant a tree. And why the answer I get no every single freaking time, and I reach out with... you know, I'm not shy. Maybe I'll put it that way, as Matt can attest. So I have neighborhoods in my district where we've done a comprehensive mapping of every single location where we formerly have trees, where we don't have trees. I have community groups, like Neighborhood Tree Corps. So I represent Greenpoint, and Williamsburg, and Brooklyn Heights, in Boerum Hill in downtown Brooklyn and DUMBO, in case you're confused, if you don't have us all memorized by... by neighborhood. Before your next hearing.

So how about this: give some advice to an eager Councilmember who is desperately trying to get more trees and who only gets rejected by the Parks Department each and every time they call? What can we do to successfully get more trees in our districts so that when I run for re-election, I can say we have

this number of additional trees planted in the 33rd. Council District?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you very much for that question. What I think we should do is take a walk with you and look at some of these sites that we've rejected, and talk about what we see when we're walking in the neighborhood and how we approach it. And... And similar to I think what... what Chair Krishnan was saying earlier is that there are things that we don't know when we're there, where we're... where we... you know, where we think, "Ugh, it's not going to work here," but maybe you as a local, you know, you know your neighborhood better than we do. You may see things that we're not seeing, but I think it's really helpful to see it through our eyes, the utilities that we see underground. DUMBO, I can't imagine what's under those sidewalks. That's a tough one. And so anyway, that I think is what I would offer to you. That we will take a walk.

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Beyond the walk... And I appreciate that. And I know you're busy. So thank you for... in advance for your visit to the 33rd. We look forward to it. We'll have some fun this summer. But in addition to just going for a walk, what else

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75

2 can we do to get more trees planted in our community?

3 Like how do we make it as easy as possible for the

4 Parks Department, and tee it up for you so that we

5 can have a big, gaudy number of new trees in the 33rd

6 Council District?

7 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you, I would... I

8 would love to have a big, gaudy number of tree

9 planting, and get trees in the ground as fast as

10 possible.

11 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: In the 33rd, Council

12 district.

13 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Excuse me?

14 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Yeah, I think you missed

15 the 33rd Council District as part of your as part of

16 your answer.

17 [Laughter]

18 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: In every Council

19 district.

20 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Me too. There are a lot

21 of great districts around the table.

22 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Equity drives our work,

23 so, you know, all Council districts. You know it's

24 letting us know. I think we're getting to the

25 requests as soon as fast as we can. There were

significant delays because of COVID. You've heard this before. There were delays because of the tree planting costs. We rejected... We lost a whole year basically because when the prices came in high, we did not feel comfortable. We didn't have enough information to know that we, at that moment in time, had no choice but to accept those prices. So we lost a year there. That was first. And then COVID came. And we're... we do have a backlog. So I'm hoping... (crosstalk)

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: The backlog is in some way separate and apart, although I'm disappointed that it takes so long to actually get the tree planted once approved. That is a serious problem. And if time permits, I'll get to those questions. But I'm still focused on the simple question of how do I get more trees approved in my district? Is the only way to actually do it to have the Deputy Commissioner come walk around with me, and for me to convince you that actually this spot works? Like, is that really it? I don't mean to be a jerk, but like, we want to work together. And we really want more trees. We need more trees. This isn't like a fun thing. This is like the single most consequential

solution to the climate crisis. So I'm being you know, I'm having fun. But it's not at all a joking matter.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: No. Thank you. I understand. I mean, I'm sort of... I take it all very seriously. It is my job. I have dedicated my career to this... (crosstalk)

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: No. Of course. 100%. I don't imply otherwise.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Yeah. No, I know. So I'm just saying I understand that you are very serious, and I do take it seriously. And the reason I suggest a walk is because I do have faith in the people who work for me, my staff, they're very well trained, they are following certain rules. And yes, maybe we're being a little bit too strict, and sometimes... but in some places... but maybe we can't get trees in our traditional way, and we have to look at alternatives.

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I look, I appreciate that. We will put together a comprehensive list across the 33rd of every single location that we want to see a tree... (crosstalk)

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: If I...

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: ... and we would love to have as swift and open-minded feedback as we possibly can to actually come up with a comprehensive plan for our district to see tree planting improved.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: If I may, I would like to share what I think is a really promising thing that we've been doing in Jackson Heights. For years, we told people they could not replace trees in Jackson Heights. There are tree shaded canopies. And streets that are shaded by canopies. And as the trees were, you know, inevitably reached the end of their lives and died, they... people wanted to replace them. And when we went to mark utilities, the Con Edison lines were smack in the middle running underneath the trees. And we don't do that anymore. Con Edison doesn't want us planting. So I don't know how those trees got there in the first place. But they were there, they were doing great.

And for years, we heard from Councilmembers that this is unacceptable. And we agreed, but we didn't think there was an option. And just this last season, we worked both with Con Ed and using this new packaging of trees, these smaller trees. We hand excavated to see what was going on there, and we

successfully planted trees in Jackson Heights where we said for years, we couldn't plant trees. And so that's why it is good to look at it, for you to know what the issues are and for us to see if there are some creative solutions to it.

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Thank you. I look forward to your visit soon.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: You're pre empting my next question and a bit about Jackson Heights and we'll come back to that. But thank you Councilmember Restler. Now we've got Councilmember Lee.

COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Hi, everyone. Thank you so much, Chair Krishnan. And thank you so much Deputy Commissioner for being here. And congrats as well.

I wanted to actually talk a little bit more about what's happening underneath the surface with the roots because I swear to God, this is a true story. I went to a civic this past week and talked about the tree stump removal \$2 million that we got on the budget, and they literally started clapping, because they were so excited about that, because that I think that's one of the top calls I get in my district because I'm all the way out on Eastern queens, where it's very residential, a lot of homeowners. And I

think the problem has been -- and correct me if I'm wrong -- but my understanding is that decades ago, the city planted certain species of trees where they... they turn out to be not great for urban environments, because their roots grow enormously in search of moisture. And what's happened is, is that they've punctured a lot of the sewage pipes that are part of the homeowners' properties. And so then it becomes this whole financial burden to them where they're spending tens of thousands of dollars trying to mitigate that issue. And then the responsibility is... okay, they're... they're being told, "Okay, well, we take care of the trees up until this point, but then once it's on your property, you're responsible for that." And so I was just wondering, um... you know, and it does cause a lot of issues with the sidewalks. We have tons of sidewalks raising up, and it when it comes to seniors that are trying to get around and do their walks every day as well as folks with disabilities, it does... it does cause problems. And people... homeowners sometimes pay for the sidewalk repairs and then find out that the city came and ripped it up again, and did those repairs again, so they just wasted a lot of money.

So I was wondering if you... what... what the Parks was doing to proactively identify and remove the trees before they cause those damages. I mean, I know pruning is probably a bit easier because you can see it right. You can't necessarily see the roots. And so in terms of the inspection program that you were talking about, would that fall under this as well? Or how do you guys determine or check those issues as well?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you for your question. I'm trying to think how to approach the answer. We... we look at risk, essentially. We do consider risks to the public and look at tree defects, and the safety of the tree in terms of the public. Now, we don't believe we take into account the way the tree has lifted the sidewalk, because... We do that when we are looking at trees and sidewalks repair, but not about whether we remove a tree or not. That is not a factor in in tree removal is how much the sidewalk is being... um... (crosstalk)

COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Yeah, and I think the tricky part is that, I would argue it's the opposite problem where the trees are doing so well, that the roots are growing, like really deep into the... into the

property. And so it's... it really is impacting a lot of the homeowners properties. And so I... don't know what guidance there could be, or if there's something that parks could think through in terms of, you know, I mean, I know... I understand the... the rationale behind obviously removing dead trees and the tree stumps, but then for trees that are living that are causing issues, how do we address that?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Right. I mean, thank you. It's a... It's a good question. Our experience and the... sort of the... the literature, the research shows that trees aren't breaking pipes that don't already have some sort of, sort of compromise situation. They are. They do want water and air. That's true, but they don't know it's there unless it's actually open, right? They don't know a pipe has water in it, until they can actually sense this. And it's... and it has a crack or something in it. So... So I know that's extremely difficult for a homeowner to understand or... or not to understand, but to manage. It's not difficult to understand. And it... that is difficult. I mean, there are species that we no longer plant. Because they are... have very much more aggressive root systems and lift

sidewalks. And that is true. So the Silver Maple, the only[sp?] maple, those are just classic sidewalk lifters and you know, troublemakers underground. We don't plant them anymore.

COUNCILMEMBER LEE: And quick question. I know that there's a tree and sidewalk program. And does that cover... would that cover some of the costs or continue to cover some of the costs that the homeowners are facing with that?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: It... Thank you. It does cover the cost for the repair of the sidewalk and the public right of way, but not for any pipes that are underneath or piping that is within the homeowner's property.

COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Okay. But still, that helps with that issue, at least. Okay. And I had another question on tree stump removals. But that's been asked already. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Councilmember Lee. Now I think we have Councilmember Carr.

COUNCILMEMBER CARR: Thank you Chair Krishnan. Just to follow up on my colleagues' comments about tree species, right? So I have a number of these

older species in Grand City, New York that uplift sidewalks, cause havoc with, you know, underground infrastructure. And I agree totally with my colleagues, train of thought, which I think is I'd much rather see the home... the homeowner protected rather than the tree. We can always go back and put a new tree there. That would be my priority. But I'll live to fight another day on that one with you.

My question is about some of the more recent species that have been planted, I believe, are technically referred to as self-pruning, right? A lot of them... The tree limbs are meant to naturally fall off. And while that may sound like a good savings, it does kind of burden neighborhoods like mine, which have a lot of overhead infrastructure wires and whatnot. So even when they've been planted, you know, in accordance with Con Ed wishes, or they've been around for a long time, you know, these storms come through, limbs get damaged. My office calls and asks for tree pruning. We're told we have to wait for the block contract. We can't... It doesn't merit under Parks's assessment. And in house pruning. It's too large... it's too high up for the citizen pruning program. So I guess my

question is: In terms of species that you're planting now, in light of all the storms we've had in the last several years, are we looking for species of plants that are not going to bend and break every time a gust of wind comes through?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you for that question. I... I definitely share your concern. We want trees to be... to thrive and live and be safe. Those are our priorities. I'm not familiar with self-pruning as sort of a... it's certainly not a... a characteristic that we look for or even think about. We... There are, you know, proven trees, and part of what we do look at are trees that have strong, both strong wood. So usually like faster growing trees tend to have weaker woods, you don't plant a willow tree on the street, right? You think about a willow as fast growing tree, it's good for stabilizing streambanks. And we don't plant things that have a weak structure, like we used to plant callery pears all over and their structure is very weak and they break apart. So they're not part of... We don't plant them anymore. I don't know if that sort of addresses that. So we definitely do consider that when we're selecting species, is the strength of

the wood, the... and the structure to make sure it is... Norway maple is another tree that just sort of... we would never plant anymore for a host of reasons.

COUNCILMEMBER CARR: So just to... just to clarify in followup. So, you know, we had a number of storms in last several years from Sandy to present. I think there was a few summers ago, right before the pandemic in 2019 where we, you know, we saw a number of homes that went without, you know, service for a long time in terms of energy delivery, because of all fallen tree limbs. You know, what's... what's the difference in terms of plantings you do today versus 10 years ago that are going to preclude that kind of event from happening again?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Right. Thank you for that question. I would say 10 years is too short of a time period, because it's probably been 20 years since we planted tall trees under wires. But trees live a long time and they're still out there. So we no longer do that.

COUNCILMEMBER CARR: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: You're welcome.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Councilmember
3 Carr. Councilmember Menin?

4 COUNCILMEMBER MENIN: Thank you, Chair. So I
5 just have two quick questions. The first is about
6 salt tolerance. Has the agency considered salt
7 tolerance? Because I know during Hurricane Sandy, a
8 lot of trees were lost because they were not salt
9 tolerant.

10 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Yes, we do. Thank you
11 for that question. I mentioned we actually created a
12 whole new coastal species list that takes into
13 account salt tolerance. Based on what we learned
14 with Sandy. London plane trees, we learned... we
15 didn't really realize how terrible they were with
16 salt tolerance, and that's why you lost a lot of them
17 along... (crosstalk)

18 COUNCILMEMBER MENIN: So are all the new trees,
19 then, they are salt tolerant?

20 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Only in the coastal areas
21 are we really selecting for... All... All urban
22 trees are tolerant to a lot of conditions including
23 salt, because we use salt on our roads. So that
24 we've already done. One reason we don't plant a lot
25 of maple trees is that they are very... they're very

sensitive to salt, for example. But... But we're really looking at salt tolerance in coastal areas where we know there'll be sea level rise and they're subject to flooding. That's where we're really restricting.

COUNCILMEMBER MENIN: Okay. My other question is where do the removed trees go? And is the... will the administration commit to some type of sustainability program with the waste that is... that is involved in terms of the tree removal?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: [audio issue, speaking with microphone off]

I didn't have my... You guys heard me but nobody else did.

We're working with a company that's looking at how we can reuse our... our wood waste. I don't like to use... call it waste because it's not really waste. We did a study to... that started to look at like how we can, you know what's cost effective in terms of reusing a lot of the wood that we remove.

So it is something we're definitely open to and looking at ways of accomplishing that.

COUNCILMEMBER MENIN: Okay, that's good to hear. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Councilmember
3 Menin. Councilmember Velázquez?

4 COUNCILMEMBER VELÁZQUEZ: Thank you Chair. Um, a
5 couple of random questions just because everything
6 started popping up throughout. I'm going to take it
7 a little bit more beyond the species, the male-female
8 ratios of plants, right? I am an allergy sufferer.
9 And unfortunately, it's gotten worse and worse,
10 because of the amount of male trees that have been
11 planted. Can you tell us if you have the ratio of
12 male to female and how it looks like per borough per
13 district?

14 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Um, thank you very much
15 for that question. I don't have that ratio right
16 now. We don't select trees because they're male or
17 female. The only ones that are really exclusively
18 male and female are the gingko tree, and we do our
19 best not to plant the female because that has the
20 stinky berries. So other than that, we're not
21 preferencing male trees, but I can follow up with
22 you. But I definitely understand that allergies are
23 a concern for people. There are a lot of things that
24 contribute to allergies. And as you saw, street
25 trees are... are not a large percentage of the canopy

overall. So individual trees, the one tree that we're planting may or may not be contributing to that particular seasonal allergy that you have. So we're looking at the entire urban canopy.

COUNCILMEMBER VELÁZQUEZ: All right, thank you for that. And my nose thanks you as well. When it comes to tree guards within our community, do you find the current tree guards available to our communities? Is it effective? Or is there another model that you're thinking of having for our communities? To protect our trees from various things?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Right, thank you. I think the ones that we use are excellent. I mean, they're steel tree guards. And we're... But we're also... have been experimenting with these aluminum tree guards that have... that are modular. So if they something happens, they get damaged, they're easy to replace the different pieces of them, they're more expensive. And we've also worked with some folks who have done some more do-it-yourself guards that are much less expensive, and you can kind of build it on your own. So... but we are big tree guard proponents,

COUNCILMEMBER VELÁZQUEZ: Any idea as to timeline for that? When we can expect to see if the aluminum ones do work out? And then we could order for our communities or...?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Um, they're out there and they're... they're... good. I should make it clear. We're not funded for tree guards, right? That's not a classic part of it. But we know that Councilmembers have given us funding for tree guards, and we're excited to be able to do that in conjunction with new tree planting, which as I know, is very tricky. Thank you.

COUNCILMEMBER VELÁZQUEZ: All right. Thank you. Those were my questions.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Councilmember Ung?

COUNCILMEMBER UNG: Thank you Chair. I also express the concerns that Councilmember Lee has expressed. I do have homeowners who have issues with the roots. And, thank you for explaining the whole lead and root issue. I'm going to ask a couple of questions about the tree and sidewalk program. How much... How much is allocated... How much funding is allocated to this program?

2 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you very much for
3 that question. Trees and sidewalks program is a
4 great one for us, because it not just fixes the
5 sidewalk, which is what most people are looking for
6 us to do, but it does protect and save the tree at
7 the same time. This year, we are... we have a
8 baseline of \$10 million for trees and sidewalks in
9 our expense budget.

10 COUNCILMEMBER UNG: Great. And how long does the
11 process take from someone who's going to call 311 to,
12 let's just say, how about the inspection report to
13 where, you know, if you guys find it that it's severe
14 enough to fix? Like, how long does the whole process
15 take?

16 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you for that
17 question, Councilmember. I... It is not quick, I
18 will just say. We have a bit of a backlog. But we
19 do prioritize based on the... based on the severity
20 of the damage. We have a another sort of calculation
21 that we do. We get a huge volume of requests for
22 sidewalk repair...

23 COUNCILMEMBER UNG: I'm sure.

24 COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: ...and I think we have, I
25 don't know, thousands and thousands that we're...

we're prioritizing both by severity and also trying to be efficient and do them by neighborhood, so we're not wasting anybody's time or money.

COUNCILMEMBER UNG: Excellent. So would it be like a year or two years or so... just tell me honestly, when someone calls the office, I just... I want to say something to them, because they do get frustrated with the time it takes. So I least want to be upfront say, you know, the process usually takes a year... two years.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Yes. It could take several years.

COUNCILMEMBER UNG: Several years, okay.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: It could. And I... Yeah, it could take several years.

COUNCILMEMBER UNG: Okay and there's thousands of... thousands, right?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thousands and thousands of requests every year for the service. The number is 80,000 for all requests.

COUNCILMEMBER UNG: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: A considerable amount.

CHIEF OSBORNE: And if I can just add a quick point just on a procedural sort of... and a piece

that I think is not necessarily is as broadly known as possible, but the New York City Administrative Code actually exempts tax class one properties. So 1, 2, and 3-family homes, they're actually exempted from the legal liability of any damage related to those tree... tree damaged sidewalks. It's just... It's something that a lot of homeowners get a little confused about, but it's but it's a protection that's offered to them. That obviously... That helps inform the tree and sidewalk program, frankly. So it's just something that, you know, we're happy to work with you to make sure your constituents are aware of the program and the benefits that are provided.

COUNCILMEMBER UNG: That would be great. I would love to follow up on that. I did read out that report on the next page. So I would... Yes, I would love to follow up on that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks so much, Councilmember Ung. I think that's all the my colleagues who had questions. If anyone else... if no one else has a question, I just have a couple more for the... for this panel as well.

So one is submitted by another colleague, which states that a recent report by Just Nature NYC

focused on nature-based jobs noted that the Parks Department employs 68 foresters and 120 climbers and pruners. Do you believe this workforce is sufficient to maintain the city's 690,000-give-or-take street trees?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you very much for that question. I think we have the best workforce that we could possibly have. And they do a great job. And we do a great job with the folks that we have.

CHAIRPERSON KRISNHAN: And you think that that number, though, is sufficient? I mean, 700,000 trees is a lot of trees. You know, it's... For any workforce, that's a lot to care for. So have there been efforts to expand that that number or, you know, what's the... what's the conversation within Parks about that?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you. We do have an increase in a few of those lines for this next fiscal year with this new budget. So we're looking forward to that. And, yes, we can always do more with more, but we're proud of what we can do with what we have.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And my other question was going back to Jackson Heights. You know, I think a

Deputy Commissioner, you mentioned it before, too, but this is a problem that goes back years, but there has been issues of Parks refusing to plant trees in pits on 76th Street, 77th Street, 80th Street, 82nd Street, between 34th Avenue and 37th Avenue, because the issue of the Con Ed wiring underneath. You know, there's a number of tree pits there. And this is an issue when it comes to expanding green space in our neighborhoods, that's a ripe opportunity to do so. Again, those... those streets are 76th, 77th, 80th, 82nd, and generally around there.

Given your testimony before, is it the case now that we can work together to plant trees in those areas? Or are there still issues with Con Ed that we need to work through? Because it would be a shame to really, you know, allow the neighborhood to suffer because of the utility lines underneath when we're in desperate needs of street trees.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Thank you for that question. And yeah, we're, we're proud, and we don't want it to stop with the pilot. But it is not... There are a few things that we have to do to get it into our regular system. We have to make sure the contractors know how to use it. They sort of tried

something new, and we're going to be incorporating these trees into our nursery procurement, so we can get them. We need to be able to do this. This was a special case where we had a special procurement of two hundred... it was about 250 trees, I think. About 100-and-something trees. So yeah, we'll keep you posted about the different sort of hoops we have to jump through to make this a more regular part of our tree planting. We won't abandon Jackson Heights, now that we figured out how to do it. I don't think Con Edison is going to keep us from doing it anymore. I think now it's us working through our process, and we'll keep you informed.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So just to make sure I'm clear on that too. Have the those trees already been planted? Or are they...?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay they've already been planted. So if we wanted to bring more in, are they available at this point? Or how can we work together to expand that?

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Well, let's talk about it. We did plant... I don't know how many we planted in Jackson Heights. It's just a handful, about a

half a dozen of them. We use them all over the place. We tried them with in-house crews. We tried... You know, we wanted to spread them around. I sort of lost track of the question.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Just more street trees where we haven't had them for years because the Con Ed lines.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Yes. So what can we do next? It's... It's... We'll have to talk about the next step together. But it's... The trees... We'll have to figure it out. Maybe there's a way we can buy more. You can't right now use capital money for it. You know, it's a lot of sort of logistical things and we're determined to... to move it through.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure. Well, let's definitely have a conversation about that too. I'm glad to hear that the pilot program has resulted in more trees, there's obviously a backlog now because of all those years. So we'd love to work together to identify how we can bring in more to these areas to in particular, just given the pitch that are there and the lack of tree canopy coverage that we... that we have a desperately need to.

COMMISSIONER DONAGHUE: Right.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: That, I think, concludes all the questions from from... from our end. So I want to thank you all so much for your testimony today, for your... for answering our questions as well. And please, thanks Commissioner Donaghue too, for attending. I'm now going to turn it over to Chris?

COUNSEL SARTORI: Thank you Chair. At this point we will move on to hearing testimony from members of the public who have registered to speak either in person or virtually.

For panelists again who are testifying remotely we will be calling on individuals one by one. Each panelist will be given three minutes to speak. So please begin once the Sergeant at Arms has started the timer and given you the cue to begin. At this point, I will turn it back to Chair Krishnan to call the first panelists who will be in-person panelists.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Thank you so much, Chris. Our first panel will be Carlos Castillo Croke, Eileen Myles, and Halliet Hirschorn.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MR. CROKE: Should I start? Yes. Okay. Good afternoon. My name is Carlos Castel Croke. I'm the

associate for New York City Programs at the New York League of Conservation Voters. NYLCV represents over 30,000 members in New York City, and we are committed to advancing a sustainability agenda that will make our people, our neighborhoods and our economy healthier and more resilient. I'd like to thank the Chair for the opportunity to testify today.

Planting trees doesn't just incorporate nature's beauty into our cityscape, but it also benefits our community and creates a greener, more resilient city. Most importantly, trees work to solve a variety of environmental challenges including air pollution and carbon emissions, energy savings, mitigating stormwater runoff, urban heat, and overall public health. Trees play an important role in cooling the city, which faces increased temperatures due to the urban heat island effect. They can lower temperatures in a city two to eight degrees Celsius. When planted near buildings, trees can cut AC use by 30% and reduce heating energy use by a further 20% to 50%. This is especially important considering heat exasperates an average of 350 deaths per year with the highest mortality rates in low-income neighborhoods with less trees.

Urban forests, forests also serve as a large carbon sink, while simultaneously supplying wildlife with habitat, one tree has the ability to absorb 48 pounds of carbon dioxide per year which translates to New York City's trees removing 1300 tons of pollutants from the atmosphere every year.

Unfortunately, trees are not equitably distributed across the city. Communities with less tree canopy cover often suffer the most risk from heat related illness or death. The fewer trees, the heightened experience of heat vulnerability. Lower income households also are exposed to worse air quality without the necessary trees available to absorb harmful pollutants.

New York City's forests are also at a critical juncture. Without concerted efforts across the board, it can be challenging to preserve and protect our urban forest. Between 1984 and 2002 alone, New York City lost 9000 acres of green open space to competing land use. With major investments now, we could see an expanded and healthier urban forests in the coming years so help us protect New Yorkers and fight climate change. Through the Play Fair For Parks campaign, we have pushed for 1% of the New York

City budget for parks. While we didn't see this level of commitment from the city this fiscal year, we hope in the future we will have an investment in parks that will ensure all of our green spaces, especially our trees, are properly protected and maintained.

Additionally, we stand with the Forest For All NYC coalition to support the goal of 30% canopy cover by 2035 which can be easily achieved through initiative like Borough President Levine's Million More Trees Plan. Protecting and expanding the urban forests will be critical in near future so we can improve the resilience of our city and fight climate change.

I'd like to thank the Chair and the committee for their attention to this issue and look forward to working with you all closely to ensure New York City has a healthy thriving for us for generations to come. Thank you.

MS. MYLES: [No sound. Speaking with microphone off.] five years and a poet. I write about trees. I live near the very real, very beloved East River Park or John Lindsay Park. And in terms of tree canopy, it's mostly gone. That's why I came here today

because it seemed almost monstrous that this was happening now. We lost canopy of about 700 trees, some of them 80 others even 120 years old, trees older than the park. I know the park intimately. So does my own city councilor Carlina Rivera who I voted for the first time she ran. She grew up in the neighborhood. She played softball on the park. She knows it and she didn't fight to save it. She was looking somewhere else. That Park in its tree canopy is being destroyed as I speak to protect the neighborhood from flooding and sea level rise. The park was only flooded for three hours during Sandy. The park should never have been destroyed. We should have never lost this tree canopy ever. As somebody young in my group once said, "How do we know there will be any more 80-year-old trees?" Which is an amazing question. They should never have been cut. It's happening because it's a poor neighborhood. And what used to be East River Park is in fact a really nice piece of real estate... or a nice consulting job for Jaime Torres Springer, a nice fundraising tool for a mayor or two. I don't trust the institution I'm addressing. We implored Justin Brannan for an oversight hearing, because the original Environmental

Impact Statement on Esker said it's fine. Yeah, for who? We begged Cory Johnson to intervene, and he said, "I've never heard about this before," even though he voted for it. I've never been involved in New York City politics until I decided to fight for this park and these trees in this canopy, and I'm still fighting.

What are you -- and I'm talking to the city Council -- willing to do for the health and sanity of the people of New York? As a group, you vote for every bad environmental plan that comes across your desk. You destroyed the wetlands in Graniteville for a Big Box Store. You approved the development of Governors Island. In fact, the person who's the head of the Trust for Governors Island said it's a really nice piece of real estate. That's where I got that phrase. You support the people of Fort Greene losing their trees. They don't want to lose their trees. They're getting a concrete park. Who wants a concrete Park? These are all poor neighborhoods. We need a Parks Department actually run by environmentalists. We need a New York City Tree Board that will not kill a single mature tree without making an informed environmental decision. Not an

engineering decision. Not a contractor decision. Not a developer's decision. My park was destroyed for political reasons. Now you're having an oversight hearing about tree canopy while killing 1000 trees. Why don't you come down to the East River Park and look at what you've done? About 400 mature trees remain in the north end of the park. If you care about tree canopy, why don't you stop the clear cutting right now. Otherwise, what are we doing here today? Wasting our trees, and our time, and our air for what? Ask yourself that City Council. Thank you so much for being in the room, anybody who is still here?

MS. HIRSHORN: Hi, I'm Harriet Hirshorn, and I've lived on the Lower East Side for 40 years. In the same vein, if you care about the tree canopy stop killing trees. I challenge all of you to stop the tree slaughter that is happening now in East River Park and is planned for other disparate neighborhoods. Since December 7, close to 700 mostly mature healthy trees have been killed and mulched on the spot. This is an abomination. This is an environmental disaster. Half of a resilient sponge of a park has been completely decimated. It is a

wasteland waiting for the next superstorm. This is unprecedented destruction here in New York City. If you are concerned about the tree canopy, change this project now, it is not too late. Over 400 mature healthy trees are still alive. The canopy right now in what remains of East River Park is magnificent. It is a success. There are birds and squirrels and bugs that testify to that success, and people, and children playing.

It is all of your jobs to protect nature. To protect these trees and you are failing miserably. You must consider the existing 83-year-old trees in your decisions. Consider trees. Environmental concerns need to be integrated into every administration, every body, every agency. Outside environmental experts are not enough to counter your murderous ignorance that endangers all of our lives. If you want a tree canopy, start by preserving the one you've got. Trees have to be considered when you plan anything, any development, any park redesign. Build around trees. Protect trees. Consider trees. All of these city agencies are full of people who are ignorant about the environment. They see a tree as an obstacle to construction. They don't know or care

that the tree is alive or what it does for them.

This ignorance has to change. Environmental

knowledge has to be transversal we cannot have these

decisions being made every day by people who do not

know or do not care about the environment. Like the

11 people in the room who changed the plan for East

River Park. Who chose this eco-cidal plan? Seven

engineers, one landscape architect, and two cost

estimators at a construction company ordered by Bill

de Blasio. Not one climate scientist, not one

environmentalist, not one person with knowledge of

environmentally-sound flood protection, not one

community member. No representation at all from

those most affected by the plan

[Applause]

CHAIR KRISHNAN: Thank you. Now we have

witnesses, virtually. So the first will be Emily

Maxwell.

MS. MAXWELL: Hi, everybody. It's great to be

here with you all today. And I don't think I can fit

my entire testimony into three minutes. So I will

summarize what... what I want to say today. I think

the first and most important thing is that this is

unprecedented that there is this hearing on tree

canopy in New York City. And I want to acknowledge the leadership of the Chair and the Committee for taking up this really critical and important issue. This is... this is something new, and I'm really extremely grateful for that.

So much of what you all have said today is in my testimony, and I won't repeat it. But obviously our urban forest is not just within the realm of parks, it crosses every part of our city. And due to that important nature, we are submitting for the record our report the state of the urban forest in New York City, which details the urban forests from 2010 to 2017. And also the New York City Urban Forest Agenda, collaboratively developed by more than 50 organizations and now advocated by the Forest For All NYC coalition made up of nearly 60 organizations.

The urban forest is not only critical infrastructure, as we've heard in the hearing today, it is emotional for New Yorkers. People are connected to their trees and to their local lands. So I do want to talk about the fact that not only is the urban forest inequitable, change over time has also been inequitable. And so we see some neighborhoods growing more, some loss in some... some

smaller areas. But it is very heterogeneous. And this is critical. And it's great to see the attention being paid to equity. We know we need to do even more on that front. We especially need to do it because of some of the things that my colleague Carlos from NYLCV said: That heat waves are increasing and we have significant morbidity and mortality associated with heat waves. We really need to be working more on our heat mitigation strategies and our urban forests plays a critical role.

We not only need to plant more trees, although we certainly do, we also need to protect the canopy we have. Our urban forest is historically underfunded, undermanaged and underregulated. We have copious detail of this in our report and also in the written testimony that I'll submit, but historically, the urban forest gets way less than it needs. Only trees on parkland have a degree of protection, except for a small amount of special natural areas districts as mentioned by the Chair, and we need to see protections for existing trees, big old trees especially, more... in addition to better management and more planting. There is some good news, which is we have some incredible leadership to rely on.

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

110

2 Stewardship groups across the city are extremely
3 helpful, but they need resources, and our Parks
4 Department and other agencies need resources.

5 I do want to land briefly on land associated with
6 NYCHA. NYCHA accounts for just over 1% of city land
7 and just over 2% of the city's...

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

9 MS. MAXWELL: ...canopy in some of our most heat
10 vulnerable communities. They need significant
11 resources to... to work on this. Briefly, we have
12 submitted the New York City Urban Forest Agenda for
13 your consideration. It's 12 actions developed by
14 nearly 50 organizations who are expert in these
15 issues. We are eager to work with you all to help
16 advance 30% canopy by 2035. And as always, happy to
17 meet with any and all Councilmembers about the state
18 of the urban forests in New York City or the urban
19 forests agenda. Thank you so much to the committee
20 for your time.

21 CHAIR KRISHNAN: Thank you so much, Emily. Now
22 we'll go to Sherrise Palomino.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 MS. PALOMINO: Good afternoon. My name is
25 Sherrise Palomino, and I'm the Director of Advocacy

and Programs at New Yorkers For Parks. We are members of Forests For All NYC. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. New Yorkers For Parks as a founding member of the Play Fair Coalition that advocates for parks and open spaces and includes over 400 organizations.

I also want to thank Chair Krishnan for his leadership on this important issue of improving tree canopy. New York City Parks identified six target communities in greatest need of tree canopy growth for the Trees For Public Health Neighborhoods Initiative. All of them are in low income communities of color. Hunt's Point, Moorisania, East New York, East Harlem, Stapleton, and the Rockaways. New Yorkers For Parks cares about urban forests because of the racial and ethnic disparity of tree canopy. It has a measurable and lasting impacts communities and residents. In communities with higher tree canopy, the temperatures are on average are 10 degrees cooler. It's time to city Council invest in a fully funded park system that can support an increased tree canopy growth. We believe the city needs to set a goal of least 30% canopy by 2035. New York can't wait. We are in the midst of a climate

crisis. New York City's urban forests plays an important role in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Urban forests capture atmospheric carbon dioxide. Trees help reduce air and water pollution and cooling costs by acting as energy savers. The Parks Department plays a critical role in managing urban forests, but nearly half of it is outside of their jurisdiction. The urban forest needs better protection and management. The Parks Department needs more resources and the whole urban forest needs investment. The city Council has an extraordinary opportunity to demand a comprehensive plan that allows for meaningful investments in the management, protection, and expansion of our orange urban forest. This is possible with the City Council making a commitment of allocating 1% of the city budget to New York City parks. We are overdue for transformative investment in our park system.

This is one of the many reasons why New Yorkers For Parks and the Play Fair Coalition are calling for a commitment to increase the parks budget to 1% of the city's budget, a call the majority of the city Councilmembers along with Speaker Adams supports.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Sherrise. Now we have Jackson Heights resident and neighbor Sara Balistreri.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MS. BALISTERI: Hello, I'm Sarah Balistreri. And I'm an environmental educator with Trees New York. Trees New York is a proud member of the Forest For All NYC Coalition, and we join with our fellow coalition members in calling for at least 30% canopy cover by 2035. Now, when we talk about increasing canopy cover to 30% a lot of people's first thought is plant more trees. But as Deputy Commissioner Greenfeld, and Emily Nobel Maxwell have both mentioned, we know that a key to increasing canopy cover is through preserving and promoting the health of our existing trees. Again, according to Forest For All's Urban Forest Agenda, the majority of canopy gains from 2010 to 2017 were due to growth of existing trees canopy and natural regeneration.

Now luckily, New York City has over 250 stewardship groups who care for trees all around the city. Trees New York is one such organization, and we are the only group that trains and licenses

community members to become citizen pruners in New York City.

Part of my job is to train and educate volunteers and school-aged students so that they understand the profound impact trees have on health, climate, and quality of life in our city. Many of my students enter the class already knowing that trees absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen. But they leave also knowing many of the benefits that we've talked about today. Trees filter harmful particulate matter from the air we breathe. They capture rainwater, thereby reducing combined sewer overflow events. They keep temperatures in the city lower during hot summer months, not only by casting shade, but also through the process of transpiration in which leaves release water vapor into the air. And trees have a well-documented impact on humans' mental health and well-being. They create calm, joy and connection to nature even in the midst of our hectic city. I saw a spark of this connection a few weeks ago, when a group of fifth graders from PS 452 gleefully discovered earthworms in their schools tree beds. Or another day when high school students from Brooklyn

Tech spotted a robin's nest with baby birds in it just outside... in a tree just outside their school.

Once community members begin to understand the multitude of services trees provide, they begin to feel invested in stewarding our trees to ensure that they thrive even in this tough urban environment. As members of the City Council's Parks Committee, I asked you to think of the stewards as a resource worth cultivating, much like the trees they care for.

And additionally, I invite and encourage you to join a tree stewardship event in your district so that you can observe firsthand why the Parks Department deserves funding to allow them to adequately manage the hundreds of thousands of street and park trees in their care. And also so that you can appreciate the thousands...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MS. BALISTERI: ...of New Yorkers who give their time and energy to stewarding trees and the significant impact they have on ensuring that our existing trees grow to maturity and provide maximum environmental benefits to all New Yorkers.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify and for holding this hearing today.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much, Sarah.
Next is Corey Hanson.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MR. HASSON: Good afternoon. My name is Cory Hasson, and I'm the Government Affairs Manager of the New York Restoration Project. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony this afternoon Chair Krishnan. As one of the members of the Forest For All NYC, we are advocating in full support of 30% canopy coverage by 2035. For over 25 years and NYRP has planted trees, renovated gardens, restored parks, and transformed open space for communities throughout New York City. We believe that nature is a fundamental right, and for over two decades we've invested in and stewarded open and accessible green space throughout all five boroughs. NYRP levied the power of public and private partnerships to spearhead and successfully complete Million Trees NYC.

As the climate crisis intensifies, trees play an essential role in New York City's environmental resilience by providing shade, creating wildlife habitat, reducing temperatures, increasing air quality, mitigating storm runoff, as well as many other benefits. This summer, NYRP proudly hosted 16

free tree giveaways throughout all five boroughs where we gave over 2000 native species including serviceberry, river birch, hornbeams, hack berries, red buds, persimmons, eastern red cedars, sweetbay magnolia, black gum, black cherry, and swamp white oaks.

The NYC urban forest is composed of 7 million trees in New York City, though it is not distributed evenly, and its benefits do not reach everyone equitably. This is generally less canopy in lower income communities and communities of color. Too many communities have suffered from a lack of tree canopy for generations and deserve the undeniable benefits of increased shade, reduced temperature and cleaner air. An equitable distribution of trees is essential for New York City to confront the climate crisis. Trees operate as the lungs and air conditioning of our urban environment. Together we can make our city more equitable and combat environmental injustice in our communities, beginning by investing in our city's urban forest. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much, Cory.

Next, Aaron Sanders.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MR. SANDERS: Good afternoon. My name is Aaron Sanders and I'm the Associate Director of Advocacy and Policy at the Natural Areas Conservancy. Thank you Chair, Krishnan and committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony on the importance of improving New York City's tree canopy, and the importance of forested natural areas in this effort. The Natural Areas Conservancy is a nonprofit organization that was formed in 2012 to increase the capacity of New York City Parks and its partners to restore and manage over 10,000 acres of forests and wetlands under the agency's jurisdiction. In my testimony today, I wish to highlight the importance of improving NYCs tree canopy and improving equitable access to nature for New Yorkers. Every borough in New York City has large natural areas distributed among more than 50 parks. According to a 2014 study, 50% of New Yorkers experienced nature primarily in New York City Parks. I would like to emphasize the importance of increasing our investment and access to all green spaces in a way that's equitable, and in a way that will allow us to recover from COVID-19. Natural areas forest makes up 7300 acres of New York

City parkland. That's almost one quarter of New York City parkland, which is tantamount to 24% but receives an average of 0.84% in staff funding, which is tantamount to 33 staff members.

While we appreciate the Mayor and the City Council's budget proposal for the upcoming fiscal year, we know that long term funding commitments are needed to protect forests and natural areas and increase New York City's tree canopy by extension. I want to provide really quickly a brief background on natural areas and their existence in New York City. 40.5% of New York City landmass is green 11.6% of that is natural areas. This is equivalent to over 22,000 acres of natural areas that exists within the New York City metro region. As a leading member of the Forest For All Coalition, the Natural Areas Conservancy is a supporter of the urban forest agenda. As mentioned today, the urban forest spans public and private property in every neighborhood in New York City, from street trees to private backyards to New York City parks. The urban forest mitigates oppressive heat temperatures in the summertime, and also offers respite and recreational opportunities for New Yorkers.

I will abbreviate my testimony to respect other witnesses time, but we are proponents of improving your city's tree canopy and I want to thank Councilmember Krishnan and all the committee members for your leadership on this effort. Respectfully submitted.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Aaron. Now we'll go back from virtual to in person and call up our next panel, which is Stephen Thompson and Ally Ryan. Please come up to the front.

Good afternoon. My name is Stephen Thompson, President of the Board of Directors of the Brooklyn Queens Land Trust or BQLT. We are proud to be members of Forest For All NYC. Trees are not a neighborhood amenity. Rather, trees are vital environmental infrastructure and should be stewarded accordingly. At BQLT, we care deeply about the NYC urban forest, because we steward 37 community gardens in Brooklyn and Queens, totaling five acres with more than 230 urban trees within the gardens and additional adjacent street trees. As gardeners, we know the vital role of the urban forest for shade and cooling effects, for trapping carbon dioxide and releasing life giving oxygen, for climate change

mitigation, for reducing stormwater runoff for urban wildlife habitat, and for increasing the walkability and beauty of our New York City neighborhoods.

We believe the city needs to set a goal of at least 30% tree canopy cover by 2035. BQLT understands that increasing the NYC urban tree canopy is an environmental justice issue. Many of our gardens are in Brooklyn Community Districts, CD 17, CD 4 and CD 3 with low tree canopy coverage, which represent heat vulnerable districts and are predominantly made up of people of color. NYC's lowest tree canopy coverage areas need to be addressed aggressively and given highest priority in funding and policy solutions. We also know firsthand the financial costs and targeted efforts that are required to maintain urban trees. Our regular tree work is thankfully made possible in part by discretionary funds from city Councilmembers. In addition, we were awarded a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation urban and community forestry grant for our BQLT tree care in 2021 through 23. This grant paid for professional tree maintenance and tree care education for our gardeners. We partnered with Trees New York to offer

a citizen pruner course with 20 BQLT gardens in March and April this year. We had course participants from 14 BQLT gardens in order to spread their new tree knowledge and pruning skills within their own communities. While impactful, this sole grant funded project underscores the need for consistent financial resources to keep our cities trees thriving. The 230-plus trees on BQLT community gardens are just a fraction of NYC's 7 million trees, which require large scale funding and bold policy solutions to maintain the existing urban trees and to increase NYC's urban forest. NYC Parks plays an enormous role in managing the urban forest. But nearly half of the city's trees are outside of NYC Parks and aren't entirely well managed or understood. NYC Parks needs more resources, and the whole urban forest needs protection, a plan, and investment in management and expansion. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee. We look forward to continuing support of comprehensive tree care and access to nature for all New Yorkers.

MS. RYAN: Okay, stop chopping down mature trees. Hello, my name is Allie Ryan, and my family lives two blocks away from East River Park, which is in city

Council District 2. I'm here today to bring a humanizing perspective to why city policy of treating mature trees as disposable furniture must stop. I am a skin cancer survivor. When I was 40 years old, seven months pregnant, I had a melanoma and a basal cell carcinoma removed. I'm 48 years old and last week I had a basal cell carcinoma removed from my shoulder. I tell my children to put on sunscreen and sun hats they don't get a four inch scar on their face, or a five inch scar on their back like me.

Stop chopping down mature trees in East River Park. Over the past seven months almost 700 mature, 80-year-old trees -- healthy trees -- have been chopped down in East River Park, my family's favorite local park. Mature trees provide expansive tree canopies that diffuse light and shade parkgoers. Over the past month, the city has chopped down trees in the open area of East River Park, making it hard for park goers such as me and my children to find refuge from the sun now that summer is here. If you overlay a colonial map of lower Manhattan, over a current flood evacuation map, you will see that it's the same coastline. You need to prohibit development at the water's edge such as 250 Water Street and the

four mega-towers and two bridges look to the coasts of the southern states such as North Carolina and South Carolina, and you will see that their coastlines consist of wetlands. We need wetlands, not hard edge flood walls for flood protection. Stop chopping down mature trees. We used to say 50% of skin damage happened in your 20s... or by your 20s. Now it's almost 25%, says Susan Chung, who is a doctor. That's because people continue to be active and outdoors more throughout their life.

According to the American Cancer Institute, melanoma is one of the most common cancers in young adults especially women. The New York City Department of Health states on their website that skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. Every year in New York City, over 100 people die from melanoma and nearly 1000 people are newly diagnosed. I am one of those 1000 New Yorkers who will be diagnosed this year with skin cancer.

Stop cutting down mature trees in East River Park. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And Councilmember... actually if the panel can just stay for a minute, Councilmember Holden has a question.

COUNCILMEMBER HOLDEN: How many mature trees were cut so far in the East River?

MS. RYAN: 700.

COUNCILMEMBER HOLDEN: 700?

MS. RYAN: Yes. And there's 1000.

COUNCILMEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah, that's criminal.

MS. RYAN: 60... 60 acres.

COUNCILMEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah, that's... that's

incredible. Because I was told we were fighting a

battle in the late 80s when they wanted to divert

Westway money into my district in Queens to widen a

thoroughfare and cut down trees that were, you

know... they don't grow. These were at that time,

70-year-old trees. And they wanted to cut down 50

trees on the thoroughfare in our neighborhood and we

fought it. We said we're going to chain ourselves to

these trees. You're not cutting these down. So we

actually beat that back. And those trees are... are

wonderful trees. They are actually the hallmark of

the neighborhood. And they don't grow that... we we

were told at that time, "Trees will never grow that

large because of pollution."

MS. RYAN: Yes.

COUNCILMEMBER HOLDEN: So what we're losing is trees that can't be replaced in a lifetime. And it's criminal. And in my neighborhood, I see trees being cut down for... to... so that they don't obscure billboards. And this is what... this is what the city does. A parks farm does a great job in protecting them. But the rest of the city does not care. They'd rather install bioswales in my neighborhood than trees. Bioswales are very expensive. I don't know if they do a great job in diverting runoff, but we have to get our priorities straight. But destroying that many 80-year-old trees is criminal. And I agree with you.

MS. RYAN: Yes. And just to give a sense of perspective, like... in terms of tree canopy, an 80 year old tree... tree canopy is probably like three or four people's arm spans, whereas a brand new tree is less than one arm span for... for one person. And as I've... I mean, I testified in 2019 against the Eastside Coastal Resiliency Project and, and now in 2022, you're going to be seeing me more frequently because as they're pushing through resiliency projects in lower Manhattan, they're trying to push through the same concept of like, "Oh, we'll just

destroy everything." And if you... I encourage you to come visit, I'm happy... like Harriet and Eileen and I am in other residents who have lived there for with our families for a long time, we're happy to meet you and take you around. Every day at 1pm, there's a community gathering of people in East River Park, trying... like saying... like trying to protect the trees. But it's but it's the human aspect that I think is really important, because we don't think about... like, like my neighbor who is African American, she had skin cancer in her 40s. I asked her to come today, but she didn't. But like skin cancer is a real issue. I mean, like, am I going to be like, every eight years getting skin cancer? I hope not. But if we're cutting down trees, like they're disposable furniture I'm going to be getting it... I'm going to definitely get more skin cancer because I spend, like half of like, the majority of my children's lives is spent in the playgrounds. And other parents spend time in the playgrounds too. But we need... it's just like right now. You have elected officials who are just ignoring what's going on in East River Park. I mean, like you drive down the FDR, you can see the mounds of just dirt because

70% of the park has been decimated. And we need to fight to save the 30% that's still there. And even in Stuyvesant Cove and Keith Powers district, like they're about to demolish the rest of that park, coming in the summer. And it's just like... it's summertime. And the crazy part is there's lots of documentation on the... on Twitter and Instagram that shows you the trees being cut, like the 80-year-old trees, and they're... they're healthy. They're not... they're not sick.

COUNCILMEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah. Yeah. I agree. We have to move on though, but I for... for coming. And thank you all for coming and fighting for trees.

MS. RYAN: One thing I also want to share that I have said repeatedly is that my children are 8 and 10 years old. And the plan for East River Park, the Site Coastal Resiliency Project, in 2050, they're supposed to demolish the park again. So my children will never see 80-year-old trees in the park. So like I beseech you, I appreciate you having this hearing today. That we need to like call for an oversight hearing with the park to address this problem.

COUNCILMEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you. Thank you Allie.

MS. RYAN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your testimony. Now we have Gabriella Velardi-Ward, a virtual witness right?

MS. VELARDI-WARD: Okay. Yes, thank you. Yeah, I'm Gabriella Velardi-Ward. I'm the coordinator of the Coalition for Wetlands and Forests. We're fighting to save the Graniteville Wetland, which is... Graniteville is an environmental justice community and we have no other open space.

As we know there are many benefits to trees. We know that we are partners and breathing with trees. We breathe out what the trees need CO₂, and they breathe out what we need, the... the oxygen. We know that trees filter the air of pollution. We know that trees and their root systems sequester carbon, which helps to reduce the effects of greenhouse gases and climate change. We know that tree roots and spongy soil and wetlands filter water which generally flows into other bodies of water. We know that forests under their... and their understory buffer floodwaters as they did in Graniteville. During

Hurricane Sandy, we were not flooded at that time. We know that trees cool the air and forests and in areas around the forest. We know that trees communicate with each other through their root systems. They help each other heal. And we know that trees and forests and shrubs heal human beings. They create beauty and their energy lifts the human spirit. So why do we cut them down? I worked from the New York City Park Department in the Capital Projects Division for 23 years as an architectural designer and a construction supervisor. One of the last big projects that I had before retirement was in the forest at Midland Beach right on the beach, that beautiful forest where pheasants visited was destroyed for a diner and a kiddie Park. With climate change, we need to begin to think differently about where we put things. We should not be building on the shoreline. I was there before, during, and after Hurricane Sandy. I know of a filled dumpster that was lifted by the water and it landed on an occupied car. The car... the couple in the car were crushed. I saw bodies being carried out of the homes having drowned inside their homes. I know of a mother with two children in her arms who ran for

their lives. The storm surge pulled the kids out of her arms and they drowned. I know of a man who wrote the roof of his home to safety. There was no home under the roof. And I could tell you many more stories. I tasted the mold in the air for months, and after what some people called a tsunami, it was said that there was 15 feet of water on a construction site and its construction site was right on the beach. 24 plus people died on that day from Hurricane Sandy. We can't help but... I can't help but think that if the forest remained, it would have buffered the storm surge and perhaps not as many people would have died. This is the fourth forest I've seen cut down since I've moved to Staten Island 17 years ago, Mount (inaudible), Snug Harbor next to the Tuscan Garden, Midland Beach diner project, which was my project, and the Graniteville Wetland.

So if we know all of the benefits of forest canopies bring including buffering the effects of climate change, why are we still allowing them to be cut down, we lost almost 1800 mature trees in the environmental justice community of Graniteville freshwater wetland, and that community was flooded

during Hurricane Ida. We had never been flooded before. We lost and we'll be losing trees...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MS. VELARDI-WARD: ...in River North, on the northeast side of Staten Island. We lost as Ben said earlier 700 and more in danger East River Park. And there are others which are in trouble in Woodpark, in Manhattan, Fort Greene Park in Brooklyn, and how many others? When will we take seriously the extreme danger that New York City is in with 520 miles of shoreline? When will we protect people from the next storm to come and not the last storm? When will we expect the private sector to conform with the requirements of the public sector? When will we consider the lives of people along the north New York City shoreline it's more valuable than the profits of the developers? When will we take climate change seriously and stop cutting trees?

My suggestion is after having been on the front line that the New York State Parks Department must protect our natural resources, trees, forests, marshes and wetlands and not cut down healthy ecosystems and destroy them. And New York City in New York State must begin to purchase a privately

owned resources and keep them from development. If we are to avoid total disaster from the effects of climate change, we must do this. And I've repeated some of the things that I've said before because I want to emphasize their importance. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you very much. Next we have Sara Hobel.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MS. HOBEL: Good afternoon, Chair Krishnan and members of Council, and thank you for holding today's unique and important hearing on improving the city's tree canopy. My name is Sara Hobel and I serve as the Executive Director of the Horticultural Society of New York. As a service provider with 120 years of experience tending to the nature of New York City, The Hort would like to advocate for the importance of supporting our vital urban tree canopies equitably across our city. The Hort's mission is to improve human life through horticulture. Through our work, we have observed that the trees and plants on our city streets are often the primary access to nature for many New Yorkers, especially those from vulnerable communities. At The Hort, our crews cultivate and maintain 1000s of trees and tree pits

across all five boroughs funded primarily through the generosity of City Council. Our crews expand the size of tree pits, install tree guards, amend the soil, water, remove weeds and waste, and install complimentary plantings to sustain the holistic health of our urban forest. As this number continues to grow, we need to advocate for tree health from the ground up not only planting trees but also improving their survival rates by improving our tree pits. As previously stated, many times the environmental benefits provided by our urban forests are innumerable. Our urban forest provides shade, cools the air, sequesters carbon dioxide, intersects particulate matter and helps manage stormwater runoff. It is also without a doubt that our tree canopy nurtures physical and mental health as also has been mentioned. The Hort is an organization that has pioneered and advanced the field of horticultural therapy in the country. We have directly observed the social and psycho benefits that trees and plants bring to communities.

In short, access to nature reduces stress, as measured by reduced heart rate and blood pressure. Green space as we know offers cultural gathering

places, oases for contemplation, and powerful analogies of growth and endurance that apply to human life, especially in an urban environment. And while I have shared several of the environmental and social benefits, there are still benefits to the Urban Canopy that I didn't address and others that are still being documented. Uniquely, we've just discovered that -- not us but Rutgers -- that the tree cover in canopies provides the essential pathway for our pollinating native bees, a fact I certainly didn't know before. Our tree canopy nourishes and more resilient, vital and healthy New York, and we at The Hort strongly believe in the need to bolster both the quantity of trees and the quality of their care.

Thank you for holding this meeting. And thank you for this top priority and an unusual one, and for providing us the opportunity to testify today.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much, Sara. Next we have Jennifer Bombardier.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MS. BOMBARDIER: Hello. Thank you so much for having me today. My name is Jennifer Bombardier and I'm the Education Manager at the Lower East Side Ecology Center. We are members of Forest For All

NYC, and we think the Chair the committee for holding this space to speak on behalf of our urban forests today. As has been repeated so many times already trees and other urban green spaces filter the air that we breathe, provide shade on hot days absorbs stormwater before it overwhelms our treatment facilities and pollutes our waterways, and provides habitat for our diverse wildlife.

The choice to plant and protect our trees is not simply a matter of protecting our environment. It's about protecting the health and the well-being of our communities. Our community, the Lower East Side, and environmental justice community, has lost 700 trees - - we've heard that number a few times today -- with hundreds more scheduled to be cut down in East River Park. We have witnessed this beautiful green space, a valuable outdoor refuge for residents, including those in the adjacent NYCHA housing, become a barren construction site in the name of climate resiliency. We recognize the vulnerability of our community to the impacts of a changing climate, including more severe storms, flooding, and increasing temperatures, and we do believe that action must be taken to protect the people of New York City, especially in

low-income neighborhoods and communities of color.

But the Eastside Coastal Resiliency Project in the decision making process, pitted people for trees against people for people, when the reality is that it is not one or the other. Trees protect our communities. Trees protect our people. Trees provide the climate resiliency that we need for our future.

At the Ecology Center, we have an education program, and we teach students and local schools about our urban environment. I was recently working with a first grade class at PS110 in the Lower East Side, just across the FDR from East River Park, and as we were talking about the role of trees, it became really clear that these young kids already understood and truly deeply believed that trees are important. They had an innate enthusiasm for caring for these trees and protecting them. They didn't need to be convinced. If it can be that obvious for seven year olds, i hope that all of us -- the adults that are responsible for their futures -- can also see it as clearly.

We believe that the city needs to establish a goal of at least 30% canopy cover by 2035 and must invest in the expansion of our urban forests, and

equitable protection and management of our current trees, especially in low income neighborhoods, and communities of color. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Next we have Rebecca Berger.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MS. BERGER: Good morning Chair Krishnan, and members of the New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is Rebecca Berger. I'm a Policy Analyst at a major New York City hospital system. I hold a Master's in Public Health from the City University of New York, and I'm a lifelong resident of New York City. I appreciate the committee for holding this hearing on improving the city's tree canopy. I too am testifying on behalf of myself, but in defense of the trees in East River Park. I'm very concerned about the destruction of the tree canopy occurring there as we speak. I'm even more concerned that the community has been offered no plan on how this canopy will be replaced. As we know the public health benefits of a mature tree canopy have been well documented. Trees lower neighborhood temperatures, trees reduce neighborhood violence, trees provide climate change resilience.

John B. Lindsey East River Park is a two mile long Park along the East River in City Council District 2. Until autumn 2021 It housed 1000 mature trees aged up to 100 years old. The park was designed in the 1930s by Robert Moses as a tree shaded esplanade.

Between 2015 and 2021 trees and East River Park grew an average of two inches in trunk diameter, their canopy growing at pace. These large old trees providing numerous health benefits to the community. As part of the Eastside Coastal Resiliency Project, every one of those mature trees is being cut down. So far more than 700 trees have been killed as was shared by others. The city claims this is necessary for climate resilience but has provided no public plan for how the tree canopy will be replaced. New York Attorney General Letitia James raised concerns over a draft environmental impact statement for the new park saying the project will disproportionately impact minority and low-income people, and the city's repeated conclusion to the contrary is incorrect. Through the Eastside Coastal Resiliency Project, NYCHA's Baruch Houses, Lillian Wald Houses, and Jacob Riis Houses are being robbed of local tree canopy. What is the plan for replacement? Tree saplings will

not replace the canopy offered by the mature trees that populate East River Park. The city claims the trees in East River Park are sick or dying but this is quite literally gaslighting. Simply walk into the park to see the canopy the remaining 300 trees provide. The city promised that 40% of the park would stay open during construction but trees are still being cut down with none replaced. The residents of the Lower East Side and East Village in Manhattan demand transparency on how the canopy will be preserved during construction and replaced long term. Thank you for holding this hearing.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Next up is Natasia Sidarta.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MS. SIDARTA: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for holding this, this hearing. My name is Natasia Sidarta, and I'm the Community Stewardship and Operations Director at Gowanus Canal Conservancy in Brooklyn. I oversee community stewardship and volunteer programs and stewardship of local green spaces, including street trees and other park spaces. We're a proud member of the Forest For All Coalition and the Playfair Coalition, and I want to reiterate

that we do believe that the city needs to set a goal of at least 30% canopy by 2035. And while we commend the increase in the FY23 Parks budget, it falls short of the needed full capital and expense funding for the urban forest. I won't repeat all of the benefits that everyone has talked about already about the urban forest. I do want to highlight one which is stormwater absorption, which is one that is especially critical in Gowanus. The canal receives 363 million gallons of CSO or combined sewer overflow per year, and street trees are an essential infrastructure to mitigate this pollution. In Gowanus, 670 young trees installed over the past decade are filling a neighborhood wide gap in the urban canopy. And I want to stress that the neighborhood is rapidly changing due to the newly approved rezoning, the superfund cleanup, brownfield remediation, and these construction activities and demolition pose additional threats to mature trees and newly planted trees. This is a common theme in this hearing. We have to ensure adequate protection and replanting in order to sustain the urban forest in this neighborhood but also across the city.

So trees provide critical benefits of flood management, and cooling, and shade, but they do require maintenance and protection. And in Gowanus, we work with volunteer tree stewards, who water, weed, prune, remove litter and debris, and while we rely on city funding, like the Parks Equity Initiative, it continues to be severely insufficient. We're fortunate enough to have the resources to leverage additional funding including from DEC and US Forest Service, and this fills a lot of the gaps in stewardship, and this includes tree guards, tree bed expansions, installing native plants, and providing free trees New York Citizen Pruner Training, and these street trees will always need maintenance beyond what volunteers and community organizations like Gowanus Canal Conservancy can do and countless others across the city. And this includes structural pruning, stump removal, sidewalk repair, invasive species control. And so I urge the Council to end the long term underfunding of the Parks Department and the workers who care for these trees and continue fighting for 1% for parks. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Next we have Matt Malina.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MR. MALINA: Yes, I have to... Oh. Good afternoon. Good afternoon. My name is Matt Malina. I'm the director and founder of NYCH2O. And I enjoy listening to everyone's testimony and just reminds me about how many people care about trees. I can't remember who it was. Maybe it was from the Trees New York, said that there are 250 partners that they work with around the city. So I have suggested this before: I think that the Parks Department can really benefit, and the trees benefit from working with these partner organizations. And we heard from you know many of them today, including the Brooklyn Queens Use Land Trust, how they're already taken care of many trees.

You know, we have a summer youth employment program of 100,000 strong youth. I think we can employ at least 1000 of them to take care of trees. And some things are as simple as clipping invasive vines. And that would extend the life of a tree, you know, by decades. The tree can't keep living if it gets blown over in a storm because it had vines covering it. And they basically act like a sail. So I think the resources are already here with the

incredible talent and determination of New Yorkers.

And I think that should be harnessed by the Parks Department and their partners. And I think this is a very... very tractable problem. I know from our work at NYCH20, we help the Parks Department and many parks and the New York State DEC and their properties around the city. So I know that we could do even more if... if the opportunity were presented. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: We have a question now by Councilmember Holden.

COUNCILMEMBER HOLDEN: Uh, I just want to... It's not a question, but I just want to thank Matt for all the work he does at the Ridgewood Reservoir, as you can get a glimpse of what Queens, or what that part of our city looked like before a man came in here, and kind of you put a lot of concrete in the way. But again, Matt, I want to thank you for all the volunteer... dozens of projects that you've done over the years, with the volunteers to make it a little nicer in that part of... in Queens in my district. So thanks and thanks for waiting all this time to testify. Thank you.

MR. MALINA: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Matt. Next we have Joel Kupferman.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Joel Kupferman. Next. We'll move on and if he comes back later. Next up is Rita Garcia.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MS. GARCIA: I'm a daughter of immigrants and a lifelong resident of New York City. I am speaking on behalf of myself in defense of the animals and the trees in the East River Park. I think it's safe to say that we all love trees. And I really wish that the Deputy Commissioner and her staff were here, and all the Councilmembers we're all... still all here to listen. However, Mr. Krishnan and Councilmember Holden, as the only remaining members, I do urge you to please call for an oversight hearing immediately. But your district, and our districts, you imagine all of us here are testifying, as though people testifying to save the trees. I've been advocating for the animals of East River Park for 8 months. It's very frustrating to see the city government and nonprofits preaching and seeking to educate the public about the importance of tree canopy, yet at

the same time, they're destroying the ancient canopy in a disadvantaged community of color. It doesn't make any sense at all. Tree canopy is obviously provided only by mature trees. So I just have some questions. You know, why are we allowing this? Why are we allowing the city to destroy hundreds of mature trees? Why are we okay with spending money to destroy existing tree canopy and then replanting individual saplings that won't provide shade for years to come? Is there any coordination between the different departments of the city government, including the appropriate committees and City Council between those preaching the importance of tree canopy with those who actually are the ones who are destroying the trees, and ignoring the community. With the rest of the world planting trees, promoting open green spaces and resilient flood protective sponges, and increasing access to nature and biodiversity? New York City is (inaudible) going in the exact opposite direction. What can you, City Councilmembers... what can you do but be a real representative for the people? Be honest. Be humble. Question the authorities and these ill-conceived plans. Stand up for your community. Stand

up for our health, our mental health, our well-being.
Do not let them destroy the rest of this park.
It's... we need an oversight hearing yesterday and we
need to bring back that Deputy Commissioner to hear
us out. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. We're going to
go back to Joel Kupferman.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MR. KUPFERMAN: You hear me now?

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yes.

MR. KUPFERMAN: Okay. I'm Joel Kupferman. I'm
the Executive Director of the Environmental Justice
Initiative. I am Counsel to NYCHA housing Alfred E.
Smith Tenants Association, Residents to Preserve
Public Housing, and the New York City Community
Garden coalition.

I concur with all the statements that most of the
advocates have said about the value of the trees. We
are concerned about enforcement and the health
benefits that are even heightened now. I just also
want to cite one more health benefit. Harvard
studies have shown that a slight increase in exposure
to PM 2.5 causes a major increase in COVID death. A
lot of that PM 2.5 is prevented by the trees. But

moreover, it's... it's caused by bad tree management. That's what we're facing at Smith Houses. We've been fighting a bad FEMA-funded contractor that basically trenched, left the tree's roots, open compacted soil, and yet we fought and fought. Parks Department helped a little bit, but those contractors were paid. This is happening all over NYCHA property. It was really good to point out that how many foresters are on staff that Parks Department. NYCHA right now as one part time forester that's controlling all the work, including a million dollars worth of bad tree pruning that's going on. We really urge this committee to look at improving NYCHA's stance on the trees, the accountability, and offering technical services that Parks Department could do. NYCHA is the second largest owner of trees in the city, and they're definitely under attack. At Baruch, they cut down 200 trees under false pretext that there was a blight. So I really urge, and we will... we'll sit down with you with detail of showing how NYCHA could be benefited by Parks Department expertise, under reorganization, and I think we could actually put your foot in and preserve. It is probably the easiest way to have vacant land. And also, we're

very concerned about all that soil that's being resuspended into the lungs of those kids and elsewhere.

Our second proposal is that there should be a tree warden system setup, an ombudsman system. We could look at Massachusetts and Connecticut, that's involving more people, more enforcement experts, and giving them some accountability and enforcement bids. Part of the problem is that there is little enforcement that the city does. Up until two or three years ago, the city was owed a billion and a half dollars in uncollected fines. So the way to fight this back is by enforcement, finding out who keeps on violating, and the city has also a bad actor policy. We cannot hire those bad pruners, the bad contractors that are out there, and thus we could reward the better ones. We're very concerned about enforcement.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MR. KUPFERMAN: Okay, and the third thing is -- I just want to just finish up -- proposal C is that the city could partake of a lot more services, including federal, we really urge you to look at the iTree program. It's used in small BIDs, but it's used in

many, many cities and elsewhere, that would help the city determine what's there, what's not there, but also record what's... what's missing and also... it would also aid NYCHA. If NYCHA just needs a full survey of all the trees that are out there, the Parks Department, and also we'd help the tree wardens, and we'll be giving you details and everything that we testified today. Thank you

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Next we have Alexander Bender.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MR. BENDER: Good afternoon. My name is Alexander Bender. I'm a co-founder and the managing partner at Tri-Lox. We are a Greenpoint, Brooklyn based design, custom fabrication and millwork practice that specializes in locally sourced sustainable wood. Tri-Lox is New York City's leader in connecting the design construction community with wood reuse and reclamation practices, as well as sustainable forestry management and local wood supply chains. And for over 10 years we have been committed to innovative design, environmental integrity, and community stewardship, and we proudly serve in a leadership role within Forest For All NYC.

I'm here today to not only lend another their voice to the choir, raising awareness about how crucial it is to support and expand the New York City urban forest. We believe the city needs to set the goal of at least 30% canopy cover by 2035, provide additional resources to our Parks Department, and develop updated legislation and incentives for tree protection and expansion on private land. But to also call attention to the management that our trees need in order to stay healthy, and continue providing all of their important benefits. Expanding the canopy and bringing these benefits to underserved communities that do not have them is essential and is just the right thing to do. But there's one thing that we can do once these trees have finished serving us as standing trees to preserve their environmental benefits and further bring value to our community.

And that is salvage them and transform them into usable timber. Timber is the world's most sustainable material. It is solar powered, and it provides so many benefits as a growing thriving tree, including mitigating climate change. I will not repeat those benefits that have been mentioned so many times in previous testimony. If trees are not

salvaged all of their stored carbon, all of their hard work of carbon sequestration over their lifetime is lost and returned to the atmosphere. Trees can be a part of the solution to climate change only if they are thoughtfully managed and salvaged and their wood reused. Tree salvage is a win-win-win situation, where we can reduce our carbon emissions and landfill, saving taxpayer dollars, create local green jobs and jumpstart a circular, local, and resilient wood supply chain for local manufacturing and reuse. Tri-Lox is exploring this in partnership with forest managers at Parks and Greenwood Cemetery amongst others.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MR. BENDER: And we are developing innovative practices that we believe can turn into policy with impact. We have the opportunity here to strengthen our forest and community together. And we can do that with thorough policy and systems thinking as outlined in the urban forest agenda, from planning to planting to care to salvage. Thank you for holding this hearing today, making trees a priority and the opportunity to testify.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much. Next we have Lucy Koteen.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MS. KOTEEN: Hi. My name is Lucy Koteen, thank you for holding this hearing. I have been working with resident residents city wide to save trees and the natural environment. Today I'm not only speaking for myself, but I am also speaking for the New York City group of the Sierra Club. The New York City group consists of over 15,000 members across the five boroughs of our city. I will abbreviate my testimony because much has already been said. I won't repeat all the wonderful benefits of trees. I hope we're all familiar with that now. We also know that urban trees are disappearing across the country right now. We also know that low-income communities have far less tree coverage and canopy than wealthier communities. The Parks Department under Commissioner Mitchell Silver planned to remove 83 mature healthy trees in Fort Greene Park. So far halted for the moment by Sierra Club and a community lawsuit, but it is still pending. The city now plans to demolish the elevated pristine green space of Wagner Park by Battery Park City. Our lawyer and vice president of

the Battery Park Alliance stated during Hurricane Sandy it did not flood it was on high ground. The notion that you need to spend several 100 million of millions of dollars to tear up one of the most beautiful parks in all of New York City in order to reconstruct it...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

...strikes us as a bit of a scam. A couple more things. The City Council should focus on maintaining our urban forests and not just focus on new trees that have a low expectation of survival. And furthermore, underlying reports when foiled for the East River Park project in Fort Greene Park, when released were heavily redacted by the relevant agencies denying the public of the underlying information the decisions that were made. Advocates were then forced to go to court and pay a lawyer to get the unredacted report. These reports are paid for with tax dollars supposedly for the benefit for the taxpayers and Sierra Club has some recommendations which I will send to you.

Just one other thing: The rest... In 2006, the US Forest Service discussed the goal of achieving 30% of urban tree canopy by 2030, not 2035. This was

commissioned by New York City Parks Department. In a 2006 document they talked about this, and now we're talking about this... it's how many years later? 20... 30% by 2035.

I could go on I have a lot more but thank you very much. I hope... and I want to thank all the wonderful advocates who are here today speaking for the trees. We need to speak for the trees because the Parks Department has not. They have cut down our large mature trees mercilessly. Thank you.

Gabrielle, Eileen, Harriet, Allie, Rebecca, Anna, who's waiting to talk and all the rest of you who have advocated for the trees. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much, Lucy. Now we have Anna Theofilopoulou.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MS. THEOFILOPOULOU: Thank you. You don't need to pronounce my name. My... My surname is a really difficult one. Thank you. Thank you for organizing the hearings. It was very well timed. I will start by asking the committee a simple question: What are the connections, responsibilities, and accountability between city departments that seek to educate us about the importance of the tree canopy for heat

mitigation, public health, and environmental benefits, and those which currently employ and oversee contractors who destroy existing mature, healthy tree canopy under the Eastside Coastal Resilience Plan in the southern part of East River Park, and also adjacent NYCHA communities in the lower Eastside and East Village, as previous speakers said. Now, next, we have also that we hear that the city is rushing to destroy the healthy trees in the Wagner part of the Battery Park City, which was not even affected by Hurricane Sandy because of its elevation. And as others said, the city contractors will still proceed to destroy the remaining 300 to 400 remaining trees in the East River Park on the north side, despite their obvious failure to adequately address the unhealthy toxic fumes emanating from the ground after the careless excavations and demolitions of all the structures in the southern part of East River Park. Is there any coordination among the different agencies, city departments and committees of this Council between those who preach about the importance of tree canopy, and those who are destroying it?

And in today's hearings, we had a lot of talk about planting new trees both by Councilmembers in the Park Department about the need for planting trees, but nothing about stopping the city itself from destroying its own trees. New Yorkers know about the importance of tree canopy. You don't need a degree in Environmental Science know the tree canopy be is provided by mature trees and not the small saplings that city officials are touting currently as the answer to the excessive heat already plaguing New York City. You can tell that by the large number of residents using parks especially those living in environmental injustice neighborhoods. The argument used by the Parks Department and parroted by many politicians and others, "Oh, we will replant for each tree cut down." It sounds good, but it is grossly misleading, because trees take decades to reach big tree status. What is taken away in canopy, carbon storage, wildlife habitat, and more in just hours, will take decades to replicate.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MS. THEOFILOPOULOU: So my plea to the... all politicians including the Chairman of this Committee

is: Please stop reminding us of the importance of tree canopy for our physical and mental well-being. We know. Instead take urgent action to stop the tree destruction by the city itself, which is happening right now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much, Anna. Next up we have John Plenge.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MR. PLENCE: Yeah, can you hear me? Good. Hope so. Yeah. I didn't know I was going to be speaking, so I haven't prepared anything written but I'm just going to get a lot off my chest. I am a 30-year resident of the Lower East Side, I teach at the New School Parsons and two schools in the East Village. I've raised two children in the East River Park, Tompkins Square Park, and Wagner Park, what we're talking about. And I come to you today first as a very concerned father, and concerned about the future fathers in this neighborhood. And secondly, as an advocate for our parks and our canopy, which I didn't appreciate so much until I found out that it was being taken away from us. But I saw firsthand the effects of access to open green space and an untrammelled area like the East River Park on my own

children, later learning all of the health benefits, but I saw it firsthand, and my children that I take from this school to play soccer. And when we talk about planting saplings, I appreciate that gesture, but that is under the possibly false assumption that soil in the future will support a mature tree.

So I urge you to look at two things right now, tomorrow, 8 a.m. Look tomorrow at the East River Parks Eastside Coastal Resiliency Project and the Wagner Park project. I've seen firsthand, super healthy trees. Part of this plan was they said, "Well, we need to take these trees out because they're not healthy." They are super healthy. I grew up in Indiana as a boy. I know a healthy tree. There were possibly 2 of the 700 trees that were damaged. The rest were very healthy. I'm very emotional about this.

Secondly, my activism started, when I found out there was a much better plan that would have served this community and given the children there much more access to green space and not taking it away. We are coming into very hot, longer summers for the next decades, and I'm very, very concerned about the children and elderly people in the Lower East Side

without that buffer... without that buffer. And when I found out later, there was a better plan that would have protected about 700 of these trees, and given the people in the Lower East Side more green space in the housing areas, I became very involved, and not going into all the other scientific things that people have been doing. But the humane thing is, there is no place for the people in the Lower East Side to have respite from the heat, asthma, air quality, and just to go study and sit under a tree and do their homework, which my children did. I am here for the future children on the Lower East Side...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MR. PLENGE: ...which will not see shade or cooling effects of trees for 30 or 40 years. And I urge you tomorrow to call a hearing on these two projects. Tomorrow. Please

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: thank you so much, John. That concludes everyone who was signed up for testimony, except for a few names I'm going to read now of individuals who had signed up but it's not clear that they're... they're still here. If they are please let us know. If you're on Zoom please use

the raise hand function, to let us know and you can testify virtually. So I'll go through each name one is Donnie Welch. Diane Katz. Diane? Go... Go ahead. Diane? You can testify. We'll keep going through the names, and we'll come back to Diane afterwards. Wendy Brower. Alexis Ganye. Catherine Skopic.

MS. SKOPIC: Uh, yes. I can speak. Thank you very much sir. I'm under Lucy's name. I'm registered today. I thank you for holding this, and greetings Chair Krishnan, members of the New York City Council and Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is Catherine Scopic. I'm Chair of the Sierra Club, New York City Group and a delegate to Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter. And I would like to say that... the first thing I would like to say is: Preserve and protect existing, healthy, mature trees. Any healthy mature tree that's cut down is taking us that much closer up to our climate crisis tipping point from which we cannot return. Anyone who cuts down a healthy mature tree is responsible for perhaps what could be considered a criminal act. We don't have 30 years. It's wonderful to plant new trees. It's important. We don't have 30 years until that

tree matures, until we get the benefit of a full canopy. I want to thank Lucy for letting me know about this hearing. And I'd like us to look locally and globally. And before I do that, I would like to thank the Parks and Recreation Department for taking care of the trees in our parks. If you've never been to Inwood Park, go. There's some virgin forest there. The only place that we have, and there are some very huge beautiful trees. But the Parks Department has also done some what I would consider egregious, possibly bordering on criminal acts, by cutting down healthy, mature trees. I've worked with Gabriela helping trying to save the Graniteville Forested Wetland, 19 acres of trees that were helping to absorb excess water runoff from these heavy rains, from storm surge, and so forth, as well as so many species of mammals, birds, and amphibians that lived there, this was their home. So not only did the Graniteville wetland with all its wonderful trees save the... Save the neighboring people from flooding, which have been flooded since those trees were cut down, about 85%... 90% of the trees were cut down. And they were very badly flooded and did not have flood insurance because they never flooded

before, because they had the trees to absorb all that excess water. And in the East River Park, from what I understand, I went to the hearings where they were showing the original drawings from the plan that people in the community had worked on for four years. And then somebody came in with a brand new plan that the city worked on. And I'm not an expert on this entirely, but I've grown up in the country I live near... did a lot of hiking and camping in the woods. You can't... if you have to fill in dirt for the for the resiliency to prevent flooding in the East River... you can add dirt to existing trees several feet up the trunk. It doesn't sound like a very ideal situation. But it's much better than cutting them down.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MS. SKOPIC: We can't wait 30 years for all these trees to grow.

So I think right now, the Parks Departments should say, this second, "We're taking a pledge not to cut down any more mature healthy trees." If you walk down Broadway from 14th Street around where Grace church is, you will see there is a bend in Broadway, and the farmer who sold the land there said

you can't cut this tree down. It was very old tree, that they could buy the land but they could not cut that tree down. That's why Broadway bends there. I wish that we had more of that kind of respect for the natural environment, the sacredness of trees, a sacred living object. Our... our ancestor. You cannot cut them down. Parks Department, please, this moment: Make a pledge not to cut down any more mature healthy trees anywhere. Developers will have to do something else. Do not appease the developers.

And also I'd like to take a look globally, we have lost so many trees because of global warming, forest fires flooding, because the winters don't get cold. We have all these beetles. So we've lost huge forest to these beetles. California alone lost 600 million trees in the past several years. 600 million. And the boreal forests all around the globe. The boreal forests are forests that are in the upper temperate region going all around the globe. Those forests are essential and some of them provide more carbon dioxide absorption than does the Amazon forest. And we're losing those forests because of manmade reasons, the Amazon so they can clear the land to...

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Ms. Skopic, I encourage you to finish your testimony soon.

MS. SKOPIC: Okay, one more minute. So please, please Parks Department continue with the wonderful work you do preserving our parks. Do not be responsible for cutting down one more healthy, mature tree. And thank you for holding this. And thank you each and every one of you on this call for the wonderful words. You really heartened me and all of us. Thank you. I'm sorry. There are too many here.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Don't worry. Thank you so much. Our next... Is Anna Bakis available? Anna Bakis, are you on? No. Okay.

Well, thank you all so much for your testimony today. That concludes our hearing on improving the... New York City's tree canopy. I think you've all heard from the testimony today, one thing is clear that as... as one witness testified, trees are not amenities for neighborhoods, but they're a crucial part of our infrastructure, a crucial part of our plan to make the New York City more resilient. And it's not equal across our city. Access to trees, access to green space, the need for more trees, and it's directly correlated to the issues of temperature

across our city. And it's no surprise that communities that are the most heat vulnerable are communities that are often the most vulnerable in so many other aspects too.

And I want to thank everyone who came to testify today on these issues, I want to also encourage us as a city to fight and advocate relentlessly to get towards our goal of 30% tree canopy by 2035. And to see trees as the climate resiliency and racial justice issue that they are as well as a public health issue too, and a public safety issue, as I mentioned before.

I want to say a big thank you to our Council Committee Staff for today's excellent hearing. Christopher Sartori, Patrick Mulhill, Chima Obichere, Rose Martinez, Nicholas Montalbano, thank you also for the great data and maps as well. And of course, thank you to my staff, Greg Clark our legislative coordinator, Chuck Parker our Chief of Staff, Chanel Martinez Community Affairs Coordinator, Shamima Raymon Community Affairs Coordinator, Will Rice our District Director, and Kevin Montalvo our Communications Coordinator. And thank you to all my colleagues too, for today's hearing. Thank you to

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

167

2 our Council staff as well and our Sergeants. We
3 appreciate it very much and that concludes the
4 hearing of today.

5 [GAVEL]

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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 08/09/2022