

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION, RESILENCY AND
WATERFRONTS JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND
RECREATION

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October 11, 2023
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HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: James F. Gennaro,
Chairperson of the Committee on
Environmental Protection,
Resiliency, and Waterfronts

Shekar Krishnan,
Chairperson of the Committee on
Parks and Recreation

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Kamillah Hanks
Robert F. Holden
Julie Menin
Sandy Nurse
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Shekar Krishnan
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COUNCIL MEMBERS: (CONTINUED)

Christopher Marte
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Sandra Ung
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A P P E A R A N C E S

Rohit Aggarwala
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Commissioner of the Department of Environmental
Protection

Elijah Hutchinson
Executive Director in the Mayor's Office of
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Marit Larson
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Adam Ganser
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Cory Hasson
Testifying on Behalf of Lynn Kelly

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Katie Swabb
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SERGEANT AT ARMS: This is a microphone check for
the Committee on Environmental Protection joint with
Parks and Recreation recorded in the Chambers by
Layla Lynch on October 11, 2023.

CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Sergeant, ready to go.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon and welcome to
today's New York City Council Hearings for the
Committee on Parks and Recreation joint with
Environmental Protection.

At this time, we ask you to silence all cell
phones and electronic devices to minimize disruptions
throughout the hearing. If you have testimony you
wish to submit for the record, you may do so via
email, testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that
is testimony@council.nyc.gov.

At any time throughout the hearing, we ask that
you please do not approach the dais. We thank you
for your cooperation, Chairs, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: [GAVEL] Thank you. Thank
you one and all. Good afternoon. I am Jim Gennaro,
Chair of the Committee on Environmental Protection,
Resiliency and Waterfronts and today, together with
Chair Krishnan of the Committee on Parks and
Recreation.

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3 We'll be holding an oversight hearing on New York
4 City's Climate Resiliency efforts. The hearing will
5 examine how DEP and Department of Parks and
6 Recreation use the city's parks and wetlands to
7 mitigate the effects of climate change, such as
8 flooding and heat. The hearing will also address the
9 preservation of the city's wetlands MOCEJ's Climate
10 Strong Communities program, and the city's efforts to
11 apply for state and federal climate resiliency grant
programs. That's important that last one.

12 We'll also be hearing Intro. 1069, sponsored by
13 myself in relation to requiring testing at city
14 waterfronts for harmful substances in the water and
15 the posting of results online, as well as Reso. 608
16 also sponsored by me, which falls on the New York
17 State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign
18 legislation to create a permanent, citywide voluntary
19 buyout program to mitigate flood risk.

20 Green infrastructure projects are integral to New
21 York City's efforts to develop a healthier, more
22 resilient and more livable city in the face of
23 climate change. One great example of New York City—
24 one great example is — of this is New York City's
25 tree stock. Across the city 800,000 street trees out

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1 of a total of over seven million trees in the city,
2 intercept over one billion gallons of stormwater
3 every year, reducing net CO2 emissions by an
4 estimated 600,000 plus tons and provide an annual
5 value of approximately 109 million via stormwater
6 uptake. Energy reduction due to cooler temperatures
7 and reduce pollution.
8

9 Our local wetland ecosystems help improve water
10 quality by consuming excess nutrients and trapping
11 sediments from runoff serve as vital carbon sinks,
12 provide flood control services, and help reduce
13 flooding from coastal storm surge. According to one
14 study, wetlands help to avoid an estimated \$625
15 million in direct flood damages, flood damages across
16 the Northeast U.S. from Super Storm Sandy.

17 Despite this, over the course of its history, New
18 York City has lost approximately 85 percent of its
19 original salt marsh habitat and 99 percent of its
20 fresh water wetland habitat with approximately only
21 5,650 acres of wetland remaining.

22 We did something about that in 2008, 2009. We
23 had a wetlands transfer bill where everything, all
24 city owned wetlands. Yeah, Samara remembers this.
25 All city owned wetlands that were owned by city

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1 agencies or EDC or any other city entity, city
2 government or government corporation entity that was
3 wetlands but not owned by the Department of Parks.
4 We transferred most of those to the Parks Department
5 for permanent protection but that doesn't give us
6 wetlands back. It just keeps more wetlands from
7 going away. So, we've been doing what we can but
8 much work remains.
9

10 Oh, okay, that's the next part of my statement.
11 It talks about that. Alright. No, no, it doesn't,
12 it's something else, okay. Yeah, I should read this
13 more closely before I get up here right? All in
14 favor? Okay.

15 Okay, thank you Lincoln. That is why in 2009
16 along with my colleagues and the Council, I passed
17 Local Law 31, requiring the Mayor's Office of Long-
18 Term Planning and Sustainability, now known the
19 Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice
20 to draft a comprehensive wetlands protection strategy
21 for the city. The overall goals of which were to
22 conserve, protect, enhance, restore, and expand the
23 city's wetlands, and to standardize its approach to
24 wetlands management. This law requires the drafting
25 and publication of report to be submitted to the

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1 Commissioner of DEP and the Commissioner of Parks and
2 Recreation, no later than July 15, 2009. With an
3 update published no later than July 15th every second
4 year thereafter.
5

6 Since then, meaning since the bill was, since the
7 law was passed, only one report has been published in
8 relation to this law in 2012. In 2016 and 2021,
9 the Natural Areas Conservancy, in conjunction with
10 the Parks Department released the Wetlands Management
11 Framework for New York City but it's unclear if those
12 documents are meant to satisfy the requirements of
13 Local Law 31. This reporting requirement created by
14 Local Law is not a suggestion, it is the law.

15 Again, this is not this Administration. This is
16 another Administration, so you know. This
17 Administration must do its due diligence in
18 publishing and submitting the required report in a
19 timely manner and not whenever it deems convenient
20 but that's not this Administration.

21 I would like to thank the great Committee Staff
22 who have done such great work over the years,
23 Committee Council's Samara Swanston and Claire
24 MacLachlan, Policy Analyst Ricky Chawla and Andrew
25 Bourne, Financial Analyst Andrew Lane-Lawless.

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1
2 Finally, my Legislative Director Nabjot Kaur for all
3 of their hard work. Let me recognize the members of
4 the Environmental Protection, Resiliency and
5 Waterfronts Committee who are here, Council Member
6 Holden, Council Member Restler, Council Member Menin,
7 Council Member Nurse, Council Member Hanks is joining
8 us on Zoom.

9 Before I turn it over to my Co-Chair, just uh you
10 know a little bit of housekeeping. There's this you
11 know phenomenon that's been creeping up in some
12 Council hearings lately where witnesses ask questions
13 of the panel. We don't answer questions, so we're
14 here to hear from you. We ask you questions. So,
15 any questions directed at us will be ruled out of
16 order by me. And we also want the testimony; we have
17 a lot of witnesses to be on topic. You know we
18 understand that people are passionate about funding
19 for Parks. This is not a budget hearing. You know
20 we - this Council stands squarely in favor of you
21 know tree canopy development. That's why in the last
22 stated meeting a couple days ago, we passed a you
23 know Bottcher Bill to require the 30 percent canopy.
24 Of course the challenge is to figure out how to pay
25 for that and a lot of people here to talk about that.

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1 This is not a budget hearing, so it's just like we
2 get that the 30 percent number is really important.
3 You know we'll let folks make their point but uhm,
4 generally speaking, we want to stay on topic. We
5 have the oversight topic. We've got the bill and
6 we've got the Reso and we want to focus testimony on
7 those.
8

9 So, I was just the Shekar, so you don't have to
10 say any of that stuff okay. And with that, it is my
11 great privilege to recognize my esteemed Co-Chair,
12 Chair Shekar Krishnan, Chair of the Parks Committee.
13 I recognize Chair Krishnan.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Chair
15 Gennaro. It's an honor to Co-Chair this hearing with
16 you and good afternoon everyone. I am Council Member
17 Shekar Krishnan, Chair of the Committee on Parks and
18 Recreation and I'd like to thank my fellow Co-Chair
19 Councilman Gennaro for agreeing to hold this joint
20 hearing today, which unfortunately comes with very
21 good timing, given the recent events in New York City
22 just a couple of weeks ago when it comes to our
23 climate.

24 The climate crisis is here. We all know that all
25 too well and painfully so. And its effects threaten

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1 the wellbeing of all New Yorkers. One of the more
2 immediate effects, which has been particularly
3 damaging to the city this year, as we know, is
4 flooding. These flooding events most recently
5 including Tropical Storm Ophelia were rain events
6 that laid bare the inadequacy of the city's
7 infrastructure to handle massive rainfall.
8

9 Once again, large areas of the city that had
10 never seen significant flooding before were
11 shockingly under water. And once again, this past
12 summer, where a multitude of severe weather events
13 have occurred throughout the world, this has set a
14 new, unfortunate milestone for being the hottest
15 summer on record. Over and over again, the storms,
16 the flooding, the events that are considered once in
17 a hundred years are happening once every year, every
18 couple years. And it's a signal of how urgent the
19 climate crisis is right here in our city. We are a
20 city surrounded by water. And so, the necessity for
21 New York to be ever prepared for these increasingly
22 harsh storms is growing more and more important.

23 Despite these climate change events however,
24 there is still time though the clock is ticking to
25

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1
2 prepare and adapt our infrastructure to better handle
3 what will continue to come our way in the future.

4 Our focus at today's joint hearing will be on how
5 the city's parks and wetlands can best be adapted to
6 mitigate the effects of climate change, such as
7 flooding and extreme heat.

8 There is still time to prepare and adapt our
9 infrastructure to better handle what will continue to
10 come our way in the future. Particularly by
11 increasing the use of green infrastructure and making
12 our parks more resilient. The city's green space can
13 be adapted to expand the resiliency features such as,
14 through the use of expanding the Green Streets
15 program, building more rain gardens in areas that are
16 starved with the green space, broadening the reach of
17 park features to their surrounding neighborhoods,
18 building more parks and playgrounds with bioswales,
19 green features and permeable surfacing, converting
20 unused or abandoned land into green space and of
21 course, maintaining and expanding the city's tree
22 stock.

23 There are important pieces of legislation that
24 we've passed in this Council to address these issues
25 and expand green space where none has existed before.

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1 On top of that, just last week, our City Council and
2 the week before, passed historic legislation to
3 invest in and expand our tree canopy. And of course,
4 we've also looked at ways to increase and improve
5 water safety in our city to, which is just as much a
6 part of the climate crisis as every other emergency
7 that we face.
8

9 All of those things are crucial but I also want
10 to call attention to the fact that we will not be
11 able to make our city environmentally resilient until
12 we invest in our park system the way it should be.
13 And we will not have a park system that reflects in
14 resources the value it holds for all of us from a
15 climate standpoint to our health and wellbeing. We
16 will not have a park system with the resources that
17 reflect that value until we achieve at least one
18 percent of our city budget for parks.

19 Something that we need to do not only because it
20 is crucial for our city, it is crucial for climate
21 change. But it is also our city catching up with
22 every other major city in the United States. Our
23 parks are essential to our health and wellbeing.

24 The Parks Department has been heavily part of
25 this process, specially to address climate change,

1 specifically when they developed resiliency
2 guidelines in November 2017 entitled Design and
3 Planning for Flood Resiliency. Guidelines for NYC
4 Parks, which is part of the broader plaNYC framework.
5 The guidelines serve as a manual for planners,
6 designers and communities to reference while planning
7 and developing coastally resilient parks and
8 waterfront spaces.
9

10 In particular, the guidelines discuss certain
11 beach and boardwalk best practices, including the
12 development of a plan for necessary beach nourishment
13 to ensure the best possible performance during and
14 after a storm. Elevating boardwalks to be higher
15 than the 100-year floodplain and the usage of
16 concrete planks set on top of concrete and steel
17 piles to create stronger and more resilient
18 boardwalks.

19 I'm curious to see how this has informed the
20 process by which the Parks Department has developed
21 and renovated its various properties to become more
22 resilient. And whether recent storms have altered in
23 any way how the department thinks about its
24 resiliency planning.
25

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I'd like to ensure this joint hearing explores
and clarifies some points relating to parks and
resiliency as well. Including how federal funding
from the Infrastructure and Jobs Act and the
Inflation Reduction Act, are being allocated to
enhance Parks and Resiliency work. This federal
funding plays a crucial role in supporting our parks
and green spaces.

I'd also like to hear more about the role that
Parks will play in the Climate Strong Community
project and the progress that has been made in
implementing practices from the wetlands management
framework and also how Parks will adapt to as I
mentioned before, the unacceptable budget cuts that
Mayor Adams has recently proposed in a way that not
only cuts from our Parks vital services, but also to
understand how they will affect any resiliency
projects.

The time to act is now. We must urgently work to
address this climate crisis and invest in the parts
of our infrastructure, our parks, our playgrounds,
our coastlines, to fortify and protect our city from
the worsening climate crisis. We are already behind
the ball and so we cannot afford any delay in

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1 implementing resiliency projects that are crucial to
2 our being able to withstand the worst effects of the
3 climate crisis. Here too our parks are on the
4 frontlines when it comes to this work.
5

6 Thank you to everyone who has joined today, for
7 members of the Administration for your testimony and
8 for members of the public and advocates who are
9 testifying too and for your participation in this
10 hearing. I'd like to recognize colleagues who are
11 here today as part of this Committee, Council Member
12 Holden, Council Member Lee, Council Member Marte,
13 Council Member Menin, Council Member Restler, Council
14 Member Ung, Council Member Carr, and Council Member
15 Brooks-Powers.

16 Thank you and I will turn it over to our
17 Committee Counsel to swear in today's witnesses.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Could you please raise your
19 right hand. Do you swear or affirm to tell the
20 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth
21 today?

22 ADMINISTRATION: I do.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin.

24 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Alright, good afternoon and
25 thank you Chair Gennaro, Chair Krishnan, Members of

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1 the Environmental Protection and Parks and Recreation
2 Committees. My name is Rohit Aggarwala, Chief
3 Climate Officer of New York City and Commissioner of
4 the Department of Environmental Protection. And I am
5 joined today by Elijah Hutchinson, our new Executive
6 Director of in the Mayor's Office of Climate and
7 Environmental Justice and Marit Larson, Assistant
8 Commissioner of Natural Resources and Planning at the
9 Department of Parks.
10

11 Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on
12 New York City's Climate Resilience efforts. As Chair
13 Krishnan just said, climate change is here. We've
14 all witnessed its impact as recently as two weeks ago
15 with Tropical Storm Ophelia.

16 Since day one, the Adams Administration has been
17 focused on better preparing the city for the impacts
18 of climate change, including creating my role. As
19 part of my role, I oversee MOCEJ, which leads the
20 city's efforts to ensure New York City is reducing
21 its emissions while also protecting New Yorkers from
22 the intensifying impacts of climate change.

23 With a focus on equity and public health, MOCEJ
24 works to make buildings efficient and resilient,
25 ensure infrastructure is climate ready, transform

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1 streets in the public realm into living open spaces
2 and make energy clean and resilient.
3

4 I'm particularly excited about the addition of
5 Executive Director Hutchinson to the office. He
6 previously led coastal resilience and greenway
7 initiatives as Vice President for Waterfronts at the
8 New York City Economic Development Corporation. His
9 work and ideas will be central to this city's climate
10 policy including resilience and I am pleased to have
11 him as my colleague.

12 I will depart from the text here because in
13 putting together what we thought was a reasonably
14 comprehensive but still high-level summary of all
15 we're doing, it came to 5,000 and rather than read
16 all of it to you, I leave it to you to read. I will
17 give you a couple of high points and then conclude
18 but I do want you to know we're doing a lot.

19 A lot of it is shaved and Chair Krishnan you know
20 alluded to this. I think relatively a few New
21 Yorkers appreciate that in 2020 the National Climate
22 Assessment recategorized New York City from a
23 continental weather zone to the subtropical climate
24 zone, right? So, literally our climate has changed.
25 This is not something that's coming down the pike.

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1 It is in fact already happened and that is not
2
3 coincidentally why at about the same time we started
4 to see a significant change in flooding. But there
5 is a lot that we are doing to play catchup as I think
6 the Chairman, both Chairmen mentioned. We are
7 working on coastal resilience as part of PlaNYC in
8 addition to continuing the work that was undertaken
9 in the last two Administrations in the aftermath of
10 Hurricane Sandy and continuing to work very closely
11 with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers on the Harbor
12 and Tributary Study. We have actually recognized
13 that it is time to create a permanent home within
14 city government for the multidecade work it will take
15 to create coastal resilience for New York City.

16 We decided the DEP is the correct home for that
17 and so actually, I'm pleased to say that very soon we
18 will begin the process of standing up a new Bureau of
19 Coastal Resilience. I think there is likely to be a
20 need and Chair Gennaro and I have discussed the fact
21 that at some point, we will probably seek out your
22 collective assistance in legislating that as part of
23 the agencies formal role but it is something that we
24 are not waiting to get started on.

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1 Starting last year, we also at DEP began to
2 undertake a broad look at what it will require in
3 fact to bring the city's stormwater management
4 systems up to handle this new reality that we face.
5 There was some very good work done in the immediate
6 aftermath of Hurricane Ida by the de Blasio
7 Administration. We have incorporated virtually
8 everything from that into the plans that we are now
9 working on through PlaNYC and others. In fact, we
10 recently did a tally and basically 95 percent of what
11 was in the new normal report is either completed or
12 in progress or it has been replaced by something that
13 is in PlaNYC that accomplishes the same goal. So
14 there was not something that we walked away from. It
15 is an evolutionary process that frankly expands as we
16 get smarter about the task.

17
18 Last year, my agency with the Mayor released two
19 programs. One, explicitly about short-term flood
20 response. We called it rainfall ready. I'm pleased
21 we've worked with a number of you all to use your
22 offices to help do things like distribute flood
23 barriers and make residents aware of their flood
24 risk. Part of Rainfall Ready was actually publishing
25 flood maps that show precisely by borough, block and

1 lot level. The flood risk that each address in New
2 York City faces. That allowed us for example to
3 target the 1600 most flood prone residential
4 addresses to which we proactively reached out to
5 offer them flood barriers and information about flood
6 insurance and things like that. However, the reality
7 is that changing infrastructure, whether it's green
8 infrastructure on the surface or gray infrastructure
9 underground is both very expensive and very long
10 term.
11

12 I'm naturally impatient and my staff knows that I
13 keep asking, why is this a multiyear planning
14 process? And as I have come to appreciate what goes
15 into it, I have come to appreciate just how difficult
16 it is to change something as powerful as water in a
17 place as crowded and complex and expensive to do work
18 in as New York City.

19 So, one of our sad realities is as I have said
20 many times, the climate is changing faster than our
21 infrastructure can keep up and among the things we
22 need to do and I'll come back to this, is figure out
23 how we as a city can in fact make our processes
24 faster and more capacious so we can do more things at
25 once even if we can't do all things faster.

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3 Among the things that we have done and again,
4 there's a lot of detail in the written testimonies.
5 We've made in the written testimonies. We've made
6 significant progress and continue to on Blue Belts.
7 We have great ambitions for the Blue Belt program,
8 well beyond Staten Island. Even though it is a
9 Staten Island Native of course. We are working on
10 cloud burst and we are in fact ahead of schedule with
11 more cloud burst projects that we are working on then
12 we are committed to in the New Normal report at the
13 end of 2021. So, we're very pleased by those.

14 As I think many of you know, back last year, DEP
15 implemented the Unified Stormwater rule, which
16 requires large properties when they are constructed
17 upon or when significant changes happen on a given
18 parcel, that they have to begin to manage stormwater
19 on site. Any stormwater managed on site prevents it
20 from flowing into overtasked sewers during a heavy
21 rainstorm and therefore that directly prevents
22 flooding.

23 In addition, in most parts of the city, that kind
24 of work also reduces combined sewer overflows which
25 contributes to the clean harbor that we all know and
care about.

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3 We've made significant progress over the last two
4 years with the Flood Net Sensor program, which I was
5 certainly looking at all day long on September 29th
6 and I would imagine some of you may have been as
7 well. It is far from complete and among the things
8 we have been doing consistently, I will not say
9 actually in response to that storm because we were
10 doing it well before that, is trying to figure out
11 how we can change that program in its details or
12 augment it so that it can built out more quickly. We
13 are currently in year two of a five-year build but
14 that is making a lot of headway already and actually
15 I think it was quite useful on September 29th to be
16 able to see what was going on.

17 As I think Chair Krishnan alluded to, the Mayor's
18 Office of Climate and Environmental Justice has
19 already kicked off the early planning work around
20 climate strong communities, which is our neighborhood
21 level effort engaging with communities to do multi-
22 hazard planning. And we are working on a voluntary
23 buyout program, which is another one of these things
24 like the Bureau of Coastal Resilience where it takes
25 a while to figure out the institutional issues.

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1 It's not just about having the money, although
2
3 buyouts in New York City are going to be
4 breathtakingly expensive but it is also about how you
5 do the institution so that legally we can conduct
6 transactions that are frankly very unlike the
7 transactions that the city's land acquisition
8 policies and practices are designed for. You know
9 just think about the question of how you pay fair
10 market value for a property that has been destroyed.
11 Legally, we have to pay only fair market value,
12 right. So, there's a lot of institutional work that
13 we have to put in place right now at MOCEJ, in
14 conjunction with several other agencies is leading
15 that planning work and we're optimistic about where
16 that will go.

17 Uhm, one final thing before I move on is heat and
18 I think you both, both Chair Gennaro and Chair
19 Krishnan mentioned the fact that flooding is not our
20 only risk. That as part of being a subtropical city,
21 we now have a significant heat program and as I have
22 said on many occasions, we are keenly aware of the
23 fact that despite the terrible losses we suffered
24 during Hurricane Ida and Hurricane Sandy, heat over
25 the last decade is still the way climate change has

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1 killed most New Yorkers. Right, that we think that
2 more than 350 New Yorkers have died. That's an
3 excess number over previous patterns due to the
4 higher heat levels that we've experienced during the
5 summer over the last decade. It's one of the reasons
6 that this Administration has committed to work
7 towards. This is actually going to be
8 extraordinarily difficult to figure out but to work
9 towards a maximum indoor temperature. The reality is
10 the vast majority of bedrooms in New York City have
11 the air conditioning. Those who don't live in
12 affordable housing. Those who don't live in NYCHA,
13 those who don't live in places where the economics of
14 it are not going to be easy to figure out but it is
15 something that we are committed to and I will also
16 make the point that we cannot stop thinking about
17 mitigation. That we have to make sure that we work
18 to reduce our carbon emissions because the first
19 thing you do when you find yourself in a hole is stop
20 digging and we've got to help make this problem not
21 get any worse than it already is.

22
23 And that's among the reasons that I am very proud
24 of the proposal that this Administration has put out
25 for how to implement Local Law 97. We think it is

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1 thoughtful. We think it is actually very aggressive.

2 We also think it is correctly designed to work with
3 and take into account the needs of building owners
4 and among the things that I hope we can have help
5 with from the members of the City Council is ensuring
6 that as the State Public Service Commission defines
7 the way it will use the next \$5 billion of systems
8 benefit charge money that is going to be raised from
9 the electric bills of New Yorkers and programmed,
10 that they use it in a way that directly helps
11 buildings comply with Local Law 97, which is I think
12 one of the most opportunities we have and one that I
13 am desperately worried we will let slip away if the
14 state and Con Edison do not choose to work with us in
15 a collaborative way.
16

17 Another area where we could use your help and I
18 know Chairman Gennaro, you've been tremendously
19 helpful in this respect already and Chair Krishnan,
20 you alluded to this, is around New York City getting
21 its fair share of federal and state money. The
22 reality is, we do not. We do not get our fair share
23 of federal and state money because in fact a large
24 portion of the bipartisan infrastructure law funding
25 is put through the state and unfortunately, New York

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1 State has decided to apply rules to how it disperses
2 that money, particularly with respect to DEP
3 infrastructure that could contribute towards the
4 overall effort for stormwater resilience that
5 categorically excludes municipalities of more than
6 300,000 people from applying for those grant funds.
7 We think that decision, surely an Administrative
8 decision, it's neither regulation nor it is law is
9 going to cost New York City \$1 billion in federal
10 funding that it would otherwise be eligible for. And
11 I know the Committee has put forward some questions
12 about the Environmental Bond Act \$4.2 billion for
13 environmental efforts including for example a quarter
14 billion dollars dedicated for voluntary buyouts. The
15 state has not put out guidelines for the vast
16 majority of that money yet. We do not know whether
17 it will be equitably distributed but I do know that
18 New York City is roughly 60 percent of the tax space
19 and so New York City residents will pay 60 percent of
20 that \$4.2 billion and we have to make very clear to
21 Albany that we should be able to get our fair share.

22 I will return now to the last two pages of my
23 written testimony but all of the things I've covered
24 are in there and by the way actually, I will also say
25

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1 to Intro. 1069, of course we're very concerned about
2 water quality, whether it's in the harbor, which my
3 agency pays very close attention to or in other water
4 bodies. We have a very extensive testing program
5 across multiple agencies right now that is primarily
6 driven by the state, both Department of Health and
7 the Department of Environmental Conservation and we
8 certainly share the bills intention to be able to
9 know what is going on in our water and assure New
10 Yorkers that it is safe. We would look forward to
11 working with the Committee to ensure that this bill
12 does not add unnecessary cost without creating value
13 or wind up working at cross purposes to the practices
14 that we have already overseen by our state
15 regulators. So, we're very happy to work with you on
16 that.
17

18 I'll conclude with a couple of points here.
19 Major physical projects and I'll go back to the
20 written text. Major physical projects take a
21 significant amount of time. Typically one to three
22 years for planning and design. One to two years for
23 procurement and from one to four years of
24 construction. To reduce this time, would require
25 changes to several processes, such as environmental

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1 review, ULURP when acquisitions are required and
2 procurement rules. DEP has invested significantly in
3 improving our procurement with great success. We
4 have reduced a nearly two-year procurement cycle a
5 year and a half ago down to just one year. Just one
6 year.
7

8 Further, we have improved internal processes to
9 increase our commitment rate for capital projects.
10 One of my big disappointments of fiscal year '22 was
11 that we achieved only a 69 percent commitment rate
12 for the year, which meant that in that fiscal year,
13 DEP left nearly a half a billion dollars in capital
14 on the table unspent.

15 Through a significant whole of agency effort, we
16 are proud to report that for the first time in a
17 decade, DEP achieved our capital commitment target in
18 Fiscal Year '23, reaching 103 percent of our \$2.3
19 billion capital plan. In fact, we committed \$2.4
20 billion in new capital projects a year-on-year
21 increase of \$800 million in new projects breaking
22 ground for construction or starting into design.

23 We've also contributed to the capital process for
24 formed taskforce convened by Mayor Adams and
25 Comptroller Lander. Last year, the taskforce

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1 released a set of recommendations, including using
2 price adjustment allowance to offset volatile
3 commodity markets, expanding work allowances to
4 reduce change order approvals and amending
5 procurement laws and regulations. Also,
6 significantly the taskforce has made recommendations
7 for the city to adopt alternative project delivery
8 mechanisms such as progressive design build and has
9 proposed that the DDC become an authority. We
10 strongly support these recommendations as these
11 efforts will speed up capital projects, reduce costs
12 and increase the city's capacity to address emerging
13 needs.
14

15 And I will just say I think those are some of the
16 things as we look to do this work, we need help in
17 clearing the obstacles to getting work done. You
18 know projects face the same delays. It doesn't
19 matter whether it's a resilience project, a water
20 main project, whatever it is. You all face the same
21 sort of delays. Anything we can do to speed up our
22 ability to deliver capital projects is going to make
23 the city more resilient and anything we do that slows
24 that down is going to hinder our ability to achieve
25 resilience.

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1
2 There aren't a lot of easy ways to speed up an
3 individual project but we also face constraints on
4 how many we can take on at once. This is basically a
5 function of DEP's planning and engineering capacity
6 and DDC's engineering and contracting capacity. I
7 would welcome any help the City Council can offer in
8 figuring out how to increase DEP's and DDC's capacity
9 to deliver projects or how the city's design
10 procurement and construction time tables can be
11 speeded up.

12 Climate work is generational and because of that
13 there are tradeoffs. For example, we must balance
14 water rate affordability with our resilience
15 considerations. Stormwater projects are
16 breathtakingly expensive. Starting last year, DEP
17 has been working on a set of example projects to
18 understand by extrapolation what it would take to
19 create true stormwater resilience across the city.
20 We expect to have a bit to say on that later this
21 year and much more to say on that next spring.

22 In 2021, my predecessor estimated it would
23 require a cost of \$100 billion, which would require
24 water rates to go up by about 500 percent. 500
25 percent increase in water rates to pay for something

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1 like that. Depending on the level of stormwater
2
3 resilience, we may have to brace for dramatic
4 increases in water bills and this is not theoretical.
5 As we at DEP begin work towards our Fiscal Year '25
6 capital plan. It would be helpful to know what
7 Council Members think about how much to invest given
8 that all of our investments in stormwater resilience
9 are passed along on the water bill unless we can get
10 state or federal money.

11 We must also consider the importance of
12 affordable housing to resilience work. Three key
13 strategies for resilience requiring air conditioners,
14 protecting people who live in basement apartments and
15 the Voluntary Mobility Program to remove people who
16 live in at risk properties are likely to directly
17 reduce the city's affordable housing supply. We
18 cannot have both affordable housing and resilience
19 unless we dramatically increase the creation of new
20 housing across the city and we need to recognize that
21 some homes are impossible to protect from flooding.

22 MOCEJ has been collaborating closely with the
23 Department of City Planning on City of Yes Zoning for
24 Housing Opportunity, which was kicked off in
25 September, which includes dealing with the issues of

1 basement apartments and flood risk. And the
2
3 considerations of climate hazards when siding and
4 building new housing.

5 We have worked closely with our colleagues at the
6 Parks Department, working to explore opportunities
7 for Blue Belts for stormwater resilience and coastal
8 protection on the large portion of the city's
9 waterfront that is park land. But the reality is
10 that there will be times where parks uses and
11 resilience uses are at odds or at very least, cause
12 delay and increase cost. Right now, the protection
13 afforded to park land ensures Parks objectives will
14 take precedence but that is a reality that we have to
15 acknowledge.

16 I would welcome the Council's advice on how to
17 balance these tradeoffs. Some of these are political
18 more than technical, so they're very appropriate for
19 electives to opine on. All New Yorkers, especially
20 those who own their own homes, also must take
21 responsibility for protecting themselves and their
22 property. As I have said many times, for 400 years
23 New Yorkers have enjoyed a relatively mild climate
24 but this is no longer the case. The city can and
25 should and will do as much as it can but tropical

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1 rainstorms are difficult to predict and New Yorkers
2 will need to protect themselves. Anyone who owns a
3 home needs to have flood insurance. Homeowners
4 should disconnect their downspouts from their roofs,
5 so they do not connect to the sewer line which often
6 causes sewer backups inside the home, even when the
7 city's sewer is not at capacity and homeowners need
8 to stop and reverse the paving over of permeable
9 surfaces, which has increased the proportion of
10 stormwater that runs into our sewers during the
11 strongest rains. I know many of you have worked
12 closely with us to raise awareness through events
13 such as rain barrel giveaways and I very much
14 appreciate those efforts and I would welcome more
15 ways the City Council could help us encourage New
16 Yorkers to do their part.

18 There is of course a lot more in this long
19 testimony. Uhm, I have a number of colleagues in
20 addition to the two who are here at the table to
21 answer your questions. I very much appreciate these
22 two Committees coming together to tackle this really
23 difficult utterly important issue and I look forward
24 to taking your questions. Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Thank you Commissioner and
I think on behalf of all of us, we thank you for your
comprehensive testimony and for all the reading
material that you provided for us. Uhm, 5000 words
is a lot and uhm we appreciate the you know
comprehensive nature of your testimony.

I'm going to be very brief. It's always my habit
or my practice to — we have members here that want to
participate in a significant way, so I will be very
brief in order to open the door for all the members
with their great ideas to pose questions. My
Committee is now — we've been joined by Council
Member Velázquez. I'm very happy to have her here.

I just made some notes as you were going through
your statement and I'll just ask a little bit about
that. Uhm, with regard to all that, the
Administration is doing with regard to stormwater.
We got the rainfall ready, cloudburst technology, the
Blue Belts, Unified Stormwater Rule, the Flood Net
Sensor Program. You know we had spoken a while ago,
you know you and I because you know I had because way
back I don't know, 2007 whatever it is, the Council
did you know the first Comprehensive Stormwater
Management Plan. That was really more for you know

1 CSO's and that it was for street flooding and that
2 accomplished and we can go on and on about all the
3 good things that that did accomplish and so now,
4 we're at Stormwater Management 2.0 so to speak.
5 We're really concerned about street flooding and you
6 know I was going to hold back on my bill because it
7 was so much you know coming out of DEP and MOCEJ that
8 was going to be crystallized into a you know a grand
9 stormwater management plan. And you know you may
10 reference to the fact that there will be something
11 big coming out. I imagine that what that is is
12 everything all wrapped up in a bow in terms of this
13 is what we want to do regarding stormwater management
14 going forward. And then, my plan was then to – and
15 that would be a great policy document but then I
16 thought it would be great to crystalize that into
17 law, which is what we did with the Stormwater
18 Management Plan. Does that still seem like a good
19 paradigm to you?

21 ROHIT AGGARWALA: So, I think certainly at some
22 point the idea of legislating a plan may make sense.
23 I would ask if you don't mind that we wait until this
24 first piece of work comes out.

25 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Yeah, I've been waiting.

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1
2 ROHIT AGGARWALA: I will say and I just have
3 managed expectations. It is not going to be
4 everything we want all wrapped up in a bow. It is
5 the first step towards that. I'm thinking about it a
6 bit as kind of an options paper, so we can begin
7 collectively as a city to wrap our brains around what
8 this might actually take because there are a number
9 of big, big changes that you could imagine needing
10 and certainly big projects even if they don't wind up
11 visually being challenging.

12 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Yeah, I just think it's a -
13 I think it's a noble and one that has worked for you
14 and me and the Council and the city going way back to
15 the first PlaNYC, when we took some of the good
16 initiatives of that and we crystalized them into law
17 and then you know that has I think served the city
18 well. So, uhm, you know let me just say you know and
19 I think for the Council, we stand ready as a partner
20 for you to do what seems to make sense in terms of
21 what elements of that new plan should be, you know
22 reduce the legislation so that would you know carry
23 forward. And I think that you know our institution
24 should bear you know some of the burden of you know
25 doing what we need to do in concert with the

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1 Administration to let people know how serious this is
2 and how much it's going to cost and uhm, so you know
3 we have - this is really an offer to burden share
4 really what it is. And so, we certainly appreciate
5 that.
6

7 And one thing that - and again with all of the
8 you know with all of the uhm focus on flooding from
9 all of the storms, uhm of course this is a hearing on
10 resiliency and I know we have the HAT study and all
11 of that that's talking about all a bunch a different
12 things but what I'm not - what I'm somewhat afraid of
13 having it get lost in all the flooding that we're
14 talking about is storm surge and uhm, you know this
15 certainly still you know was, is and will be the you
16 know the most threatening current present danger.
17 Although with street flooding of late I think you
18 know, I think storm surge has kind of like a run for
19 its money with everything that we're doing in all the
20 flooding that we're having.

21 And I have you know long been a fan of you know
22 storm surge barriers, whatever people have different
23 ideas about that but if you could just tell us where
24 we are with regard to you know getting out in front
25 of and planning for a storm surge. I just - that has

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1 to be part of the equation. That is part of the
2 conversation.
3

4 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Thank you, yes and certainly.
5 And so, there's a couple of things there. First of
6 all, there are a number of projects, sorry if I don't
7 cite my list. I'm going to miss a couple but there
8 are a number of - do you got it? Yeah.

9 So, I'll ask Elijah to talk to some of the
10 projects but quickly, we've got a set of projects
11 right now that the city is driving. In conjunction
12 in many cases or certainly in coordination with the
13 Army Corp but where the city is actually leading the
14 work as it is with Eastside Coastal Resilience, which
15 is certainly underway as you all know and actually
16 closer to completion than to initiation.

17 Part of the reason a creative bureau of coastal
18 resilience is that we expect the city's portfolio of
19 projects like that only to grow.

20 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Right.

21 ROHIT AGGARWALA: And we've had some very
22 promising conversations with the Army Corp about new
23 models of project delivery that they are empowered to
24 explore, that might allow us to do even more of that
25 in conjunction with the Army Corp.

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3 Specifically with respect to the HAT study, the
4 Army Corp has not yet released its decision on you
5 know they had put out the recommended, the
6 recommended alternative, which is primarily around
7 landside barriers with a number of title barriers at
8 specific water bodies like Jamaica Bay, Flushing Bay,
9 Kill Van Kull etc.. I believe they received
10 something like 6,000 comments, far more than they'd
11 ever done for any project and I think to their
12 credit, the Army Corp has been very communicative
13 with us and with the two states that are its
14 partners. I don't have anything to say on where that
15 process is heading right now. I believe the Army
16 Corp may be here. They can speak for themselves but
17 I have to say, I think it's going well.

18 The sad reality is those are some of the most
19 long-term projects you can imagine.

20 CHAIRPERSON GENARRO: Right.

21 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Right, that is the work of
22 decades and not years, which is why again it becomes
23 so important for us to think about the things we can
24 do that compliment that in the near term. But
25 Elijah, maybe you could talk about the status of the
specific projects.

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ELIJAH HUTCHINSON: Sure. Just adding to -

CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Also, greetings to your first appearance before the Committee and uhm, we all congratulate you on your new position and wish you well.

ELIJAH HUTCHINSON: Thank you so much. It's an honor to be here and as a Native New Yorker and someone whose been in government for over a decade.

CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: That's where the fun stops by the way. Now you're like going to get it.

ELIJAH HUTCHINSON: We - building off what Rit is saying with our collaboration with the Army Corp, there in a process of understanding and responding to all of the feedback they received from the city but I wanted to focus that our feedback was about making sure that their approach covers multiple hazards and multiple climate risks that they focus on environmental justice communities. That they prioritize community engagement and outreach as they move forward in their process and that they expedite project delivery as much as possible so that we can see results from their process and work with them to deliver these projects as soon as we can.

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1 So, there's a ton of collaboration happening with
2
3 the Corp as well as with other city agencies on our
4 coastal resilience portfolio of projects, there are
5 some that we're more familiar with like Eastside
6 Coastal Resilience. There are others that are under
7 construction like the Battery Coastal Resilience
8 Project, Brooklyn Bridge Montgomery Coastal
9 Resilience Project, which there are shovels in the
10 ground. There are also groundbreakings that happened
11 recently at Battery Park City and then there's other
12 coastal resilience projects and plans happening in
13 Coney Island and Red Hook and other neighborhoods
14 where we're raising the shorelines and street ends to
15 have more protection from those coastal storm surges
16 and then we also have the climate strong communities
17 process, which is the process by which we are
18 developing a pipeline of projects, building off the
19 neighborhoods that were impacted during Sandy but
20 really thinking about what's next. And I know that
21 there were questions about you know the
22 prioritization of the projects that are there and
23 what our selection criteria were for that work. Uhm,
24 and we are focused on the communities that are
25 identified as environmental justice communities.

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1 We're focused on areas that are going to be receiving
2 multiple hazards and multiple climate threats and
3 we're also looking at the areas where it's really
4 going to be possible for a city led adaptation
5 project to make a difference within that
6 neighborhood. So, we're excited to work with you
7 all.

9 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Thank you. Thank you very
10 much. I have many more questions but I'm going to be
11 here all day. I'm very eager to hear from my
12 esteemed Co-Chair and all of the members of my
13 Committee and his Committee who are here, so I am
14 going to cut off my questioning for now. I recognize
15 my great Co-Chair and hear from other members who
16 have a lot of value added but I will just make a note
17 to staff in my Committee that I would like to make
18 arrangements for a briefing with Elijah to find out
19 everything that's really going on regarding storm
20 surge. That's what kind of keeps me up at night and
21 so, that's a note to staff if we can get that
22 arranged, that would be great okay?

23 ELIJAH HUTCHINSON: Certainly.

24 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: And with that, I recognized
25 my esteemed Co-Chair.

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CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Chair

Gennaro and thank you for your questions too. Before I get started with my questions, I do want to recognize that we've been joined by a special guest, someone I met with earlier. Uhm, Mayor Nagesh Koirala from Biratnagar Nepal who is here. We met earlier today in my office. Mayor Koirala is the son of the Koirala family which was instrumental in bringing democracy to Nepal and one of the reasons why he's here for this hearing is because one of his priorities in Biratnagar Nepal is to focus on building a waste water treatment plant because in Nepal, they are also addressing the serious issue of their streets flooding because of the monsoons.

So, thank you so much Mayor Koirala for joining us. [APPLAUSE] And as the Mayor and I have talked about and as we all know, the climate crisis is an international crisis effecting all of our countries in different ways, and so I look forward to ways that we can collaborate both here in the city and globally all of us as citizens to address this issue of the climate crisis facing our world.

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CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: I just want to make a note
to my staff, the next time we have a hearing, we got
to bring somebody too.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Set the bar high on this
one. We going international here but thank you so
much to our panel of Commissioners. The
Commissioners who are here today, we appreciate your
testimony very much and the work that you're doing in
our city when it comes to resilience work and we
appreciate also that the testimony Commissioner
Koirala is so long because you had a 5,000-word
testimony set to go because of all of the work that
you all are doing and that's the kind of thing we'd
like to hear given the magnitude of what we're
facing.

I just have a few questions myself before turning
it over to colleagues. I did want to focus Assistant
Commissioner on our parks and how our parks are a
critical piece of our climate resiliency work as
well. So, just you know before focusing on other
areas, I did mention in my opening statement the
importance of our tree canopy as part of our – the
fight against climate change too. And so, one
question I had was given the legislation we passed,

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1 given the goal that I believe is critical of getting
2 to a 30 percent tree canopy cover by 2035, how has
3 parks approached and thought about addressing an
4 increase in tree plantings in our tree canopy,
5 particularly in areas that desperately need it and
6 lack it?
7

8 MARIT LARSON: Thank you for the question. I
9 definitely appreciate and Parks greatly appreciates
10 the support and emphasis on protecting the city's
11 tree canopy and it's obviously a major focus of our
12 agency. With respect to some of the questions that
13 we've received both in advance of the hearing and in
14 the context of some of the bills that are proposed, I
15 just wanted to reiterate that our tree planting
16 efforts continue to prioritize areas defined as
17 highly heat vulnerable by the Department of Health,
18 you know Heat Vulnerability Index and the factors
19 that go into the development of this index. So, that
20 continues to be the focus area.

21 I'm not going to speak in detail to our tree
22 planting priorities and the testimony that's probably
23 been given in the last hearing, it's not my area of
24 expertise and I'm glad to take back any specific
25 questions to our colleagues, my counterparts in the

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1 forestry division in particular. But the rollout of
2 our tree planting efforts both in the right of way
3 and in our natural areas continues to be, you know a
4 main focus. As you may have heard, we have been very
5 successful. Not as successful as we wanted to be but
6 pretty successful in getting federal funding through
7 the IRA for our tree planting efforts. In
8 particular, in natural areas, we received you know
9 \$10 million through the program of Urban and
10 Community Forestry just announced last month and in
11 addition, we received \$5 billion to focus on urban
12 tree care and stewardship of planting again in some
13 of our priority environmental justice areas. So,
14 that continues to be our focus and we're looking at
15 creative ways to bring more federal funding into that
16 effort.
17

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: absolutely and I've very
19 much appreciated Parks efforts in that regard too and
20 the work that we done together with Majority Leader
21 Schumer as well to make sure that it's communities
22 that particularly lack tree canopy coverage that are
23 prioritized when it comes to IRA funding that our
24 city has received, so thank you for Parks leadership
25 on that front.

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1 Going to the federal grant programs in
2
3 particular, because I think you know one of the
4 biggest things that we keep coming back to is we need
5 more investments in our communities, in this area in
6 particular to and so, one thing I wanted to ask was,
7 how will the city ensure that it gets its fair share
8 of funding from the New York State Environmental Bond
9 Act?

10 MARIT LARSON: Thank you for the question and
11 highlighting the importance of the Bond Act, which
12 we're very much aware of and have been eagerly
13 awaiting information about for the last many years.
14 We are taking – the way in which we're preparing for
15 the opportunity to apply is to be meeting with our
16 state DEP counterparts that can give us any insight
17 into the focus of the opportunities. In particular
18 in the last month, we submitted probably about 15
19 potential projects through their survey opportunity,
20 so that we could get feedback on what kinds of
21 projects they might be receptive to funding. We also
22 focused very much on identifying some of the
23 constraints that might hinder us from being
24 successful in those applications. Some of which
25 might relate to the timeframe in which they would

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1 expect implementation. We've heard today about some
2 of our challenges in procurement and our overall
3 capital design schedules and we want to be
4 competitive with upstate in any capital programs, for
5 example that we would apply for. So, it's very much
6 on our mind looking at what successful projects could
7 be.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And if you all aren't able
10 to receive that funding for whatever reason or you
11 know we don't get more through the IRA for example,
12 what are the contingency plans in place for the city
13 to still access funds that would be needed for these
14 resiliency programs?

15 MARIT LARSON: Thank you for the question.
16 That's focusing on funding, obviously very critical.
17 We in some ways uhm, our mindset is always to be
18 maybe scrappy and really pursue all the opportunities
19 that we can. We're continuing through to explore
20 grant opportunities specifically through the Mayor's,
21 the Deputy Mayor's Grants Taskforce. That's been a
22 way in which we are sharing information across city
23 agencies about opportunities. We're continuing to
24 pursue grants, grant opportunities from federal
25 agencies like NOAA, National Oceanic and Atmospheric

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1 Administration. We've done that for years and
2
3 continue to do so as well as pursue opportunities
4 from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. They
5 funded many of our projects that have contributed to
6 us understanding the conditions and particular
7 wetlands over the last ten years. We are continuing
8 to look at other state programs that have always for
9 decades really funded projects, both capital projects
10 and stewardship and job training projects.

11 So, we can you know, provide you just to give you
12 a more thorough understanding of what we've
13 accomplished in the last ten years, what those lists
14 of grants are and what we have coming down the pike
15 but we continue to actively pursue that and at any
16 given time, you know more than a dozen projects that
17 are grant funded and more than a dozen that we're
18 pursuing on that scale.

19 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Commissioner?

20 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Just to clarify, were you
21 focused on resilience projects in parks or more
22 general?

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Parks in particular with
24 my question but also if you do have any comments on
25

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1 resiliency projects in general too, very happy to
2 hear about that too.
3

4 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Well, I'll just reiterate that
5 you know when we don't get federal money, either we
6 have to take money out of city tax levy for things
7 like coastal resilience currently. We're for
8 stormwater projects. We have to raise the water
9 rate.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it, thank you. Now,
11 going back to parks a bit, you know one of the things
12 that I'm - and a few more questions, then I'm going
13 to turn it over to my colleagues. One was uh, you
14 know on September 29th, when the storm happened and
15 you know, one thing that really struck me, both in
16 walking my kids to school and seeing extensive
17 flooding that morning and then over the course of the
18 day, was I maintain that our parks and tree canopy
19 have such an essential role to play in absorbing
20 stormwater, in incorporating green infrastructure to
21 assist with the issue of major flooding that we've
22 seen. With this storm, with Ida before, you know my
23 district in particular, Queens Boulevard, places like
24 that that were extraordinarily flooded could really
25 benefit from more creative infrastructure from Parks

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1 and otherwise to address the flooding that we see in
2 the rain.
3

4 So, I'm just curious since this is our first time
5 talking since that storm. How has Parks thought
6 about, not so much its response yes, but also
7 proactively looking into the future prospectively,
8 what else have you all had about how Parks could play
9 a role in addressing this issue and protecting us
10 from the next climate emergency? What was your
11 thinking before? How has it changed? What other
12 measures do you all see as critical that could be
13 implemented now when the next storm comes, which it
14 will?

15 MARIT LARSON: Thank you for that question. We
16 are in some ways always looking at stormwater
17 response throughout our parks system and both
18 incorporating green and gray infrastructure. So,
19 I'll go back to just focusing on for a minute the
20 kinds of formal green infrastructure that we've had
21 with DEP and then just mention some of our other
22 approaches.

23 So, we've worked with DEP on expanding green
24 infrastructure for stormwater capture since 2011 and
25 we are continuing to bolster that program both

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1 through retrofits in our parks to capture both the
2 impervious area within our parks property as well as
3 impervious area on the street through a number of
4 programs. Retrofitting parks, adding green
5 infrastructure components into new park projects and
6 pursuing grants to expand our ability to do more
7 creative green infrastructure projects. We've got
8 for example, a number of projects in Staten Island
9 that wouldn't have otherwise come under other funding
10 programs, so that we can expand our own ability
11 within our design and construction teams to implement
12 projects that capture stormwater from our own assets
13 as well as from the streets.

14 So, that continues to be a big focus. We've got
15 dozens moving towards you know hundreds of projects
16 that are in design and that will come online over the
17 next several years. So, with that rollout of
18 programs, we are always increasing our capacity and
19 ability to be creative, to speak to that component
20 and I think you'll see in the testimony that there
21 are a number of project - types of programs that
22 we're of course partnering on with DEP, whether it's
23 cloudburst programs that happen in parks or Blue Belt
24 programs. But to speak to some of our other elements
25

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1 of you know attention to having resilient parks, I
2 mean that's part of the reason we pay such close
3 attention to the type of tree planting we do, how we
4 do it, doing it right but whether both on the street
5 or in the natural areas and increasingly with you
6 know over the last ten years, an understanding of the
7 climate change and the likelihood of having more
8 resilient species coming from the south, we're
9 actually looking very carefully at our plant palate.
10 So, that's an ongoing effort. It's not you know
11 something that we're suddenly thinking about you know
12 since last week or even since IDA and then lastly,
13 I'll just say that it's particularly important that
14 we understand the critical aspect of maintenance.
15 Whether it's maintaining you know the vegetation,
16 maintaining rain gardens, ability to clean out catch
17 basins after a storm but it goes back to being able
18 to do and have the resources to do the work on the
19 ground to make sure these green infrastructure
20 systems are ready for the next storm.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you and I just urge
23 you all to really, to keep that planning going
24 because you know there's far more we have to do on
25 that front. Think of our parks you know as

1 fortifications against climate change. So, I'm
2 heartened to hear the efforts and encourage them to
3 keep going.

4
5 My final question is you know and really for both
6 Parks and DEP is, we're talking about all these
7 issues that are so crucial measures that need to be
8 implemented requiring funding from all different
9 levels of government and we couldn't agree more with
10 that. At the same time, we are looking at the
11 Administration that's proposing drastic PEGs that
12 will cut from the very types of work and services,
13 including these that we need to fortify our city, so
14 my question for you all is, how will the recently
15 announced hiring freeze, the PEG proposals phased in
16 three times over the next year by the Mayor disrupt
17 the city's climate resiliency projects?

18 ROHIT AGGARWALA: So, let me start by saying at
19 least in so far as DEP is concerned, the water
20 utility portion of DEP's budget, which is a little
21 more than 90 percent of our budget and it includes
22 all of the stormwater and sewer work is not subject
23 to the PEG. We are subject to the OTPS freeze and we
24 are subject to the hiring freeze but we're not
25 subject to the PEG. And of course, we are doing

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1 everything we possibly can to ensure that none of our
2 services are hurt or slowed down by that but we are
3 working through the two freezes that we are subject
4 to.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you Commissioner and
7 I would just add there's a disconnect there between
8 the work that you all need to be doing and are doing
9 and getting the appropriate funding from our own city
10 government to do so. If we expect the federal
11 government and the states to step in, then our city
12 needs to be the first mover to act and put that
13 funding in, especially when it comes to resiliency
14 projects. For Parks, you know I'd ask the same
15 question of you as well Assistant Commissioner and
16 with really a focus on for Parks, you mentioned
17 maintenance and how important that is to. So, how
18 would these PEGs, how are you all thinking about
19 these PEGs? How will they effect maintenance and the
20 operations, especially for Parks that are smaller and
21 don't have the private conservancy resources that
22 depend on city funding.

23 MARIT LARSON: Well, I'm actually not prepared to
24 answer that and I think as an agency, I don't think
25 we're quite ready yet either. We'll be working with

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1 OMB and working with our budget office to identify
2 how to best respond. So, we're committed to
3 maintaining the parks at a standard that we've always
4 held and will continue to do so but we won't have any
5 specific response until the November plan comes out
6 at that time.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you and I would just
9 add again, we're in a conversation about cutting from
10 Parks and green spaces that are crucial for our
11 health, crucial for our climate. The conversation
12 should really be about how to increase resources for
13 our Parks Department and so, to see PEGs being
14 proposed by this Administration that will give you
15 all fewer resources to maintain our green spaces,
16 fewer resources to make our parks more resilient in
17 the face of a worsening climate crisis, worsening
18 floods is shocking and doesn't comport with the work
19 that we know needs to be done to actually invest in
20 our parks system.

21 On that note, I'll turn it over now for questions
22 from our colleagues. And the first one is Council
23 Member Brooks-Powers.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you Chairs
25 and thank you Commissioner for your remarks. As you

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1 know, in my district last week, we saw flooding due
2 to mesh that was left on top of catch basins on
3 construction corridors but that mesh was
4 unfortunately not removed prior to the flooding at
5 these locations.
6

7 How is DEP addressing this issue in advance of
8 future floodings? Also, how frequently does DEP
9 clean catch basins? Can you walk through what the
10 protocols are in place to ensure catch basins receive
11 the necessary maintenance and cleaning? And finally,
12 in 2018, the Mayor made a commitment of \$2 billion
13 towards improving sewer infrastructure in Southeast
14 Queens neighborhoods. Can you provide an update on
15 the progress of that project and is there any plans
16 on expediting that particular project? Because we
17 see these now frequent weather events happening,
18 where not only the places that have been queued up
19 for – that have historically received flooding, we're
20 seeing new parts of Queens that are receiving
21 flooding as well. And I know I said that was last
22 but the last, last is in the Arverne community along
23 Beach 67 Street. DEP came and in and thankfully put
24 infrastructure in that was supposed to suck up the
25 water from these weather events and to help prevent

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1 the flooding. Unfortunately, the way it was built,
2 the pitch has created a dynamic where along Brisby
3 Basin uhm, excuse me Brisby and Beach 67th there has
4 been a lot of flooding going into the homes. We saw
5 that in Winter Storm Elliot in December, we saw that
6 again last week with the rain water. It doesn't even
7 really take those weather events if we have high
8 tide, if there's light rain, we are still seeing it.
9 So, can DEP come back, revisit that site and do the
10 necessary work to address that project that took
11 place and now is impacting over a dozen homes along
12 that strip?

14 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Thank you Council Member. I'll
15 try to tackle these in reverse order. Regarding the
16 specific project in Arverne, of course we'll have
17 somebody come take a look. I'm not going to commit
18 we can fix it until we know what we think is going on
19 but we will certainly work with your office.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Well, the
21 challenge is, some of those homes even before, they
22 didn't get level of flooding they got now, and the
23 contractors that did it had acknowledged to some of
24 the homeowners that it was not, when they looked back
25 after the fact, it was not pitched correctly.

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1
2 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Okay, well we will, as I said,
3 we'll look into that particular site. In terms of
4 Southeast Queens, the work is proceeding. I think as
5 I was saying in my statement, we are thinking broadly
6 about how we can expand and accelerate stormwater
7 management work across the city, so we don't have any
8 specific plans right now to accelerate the work
9 specifically going on in Southeast Queens but that is
10 in the budget. It is in the budget for all of the
11 next ten years so that work is getting slated to
12 continue on.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: I'm sorry, to that
14 point, what will the city be doing in the meantime
15 because we have homeowners that are being flooded.
16 We have people who live in the basement in those
17 areas. We have high water tables. Literally one of
18 my residents in my district woke up by standing up
19 off her bed to get ready for work only to find that
20 her feet was covered with water. So, as they wait
21 for this construction project to take place, what is
22 the city doing to make sure that we are mitigating
23 the flooding that's taking place?

24 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Well, Council Member, look as I
25 said, the reality is, these are long term projects,

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1 right? There is no matter, no amount of desire on
2 our part could accelerate all of those projects at
3 once. It's one of the reasons that we started last
4 year or only a couple months after this
5 Administration took office rainfall ready, which is
6 really as I have characterize it, it's the band aide.
7 You know a band aide is what you put on a wound.
8 While nature slowly heals the wound but you protect
9 it from getting worse, right? And so what that
10 includes for example is the distribution of flood
11 barriers, which are not a unique technology. You can
12 buy them at Home Depot. We give them out you know in
13 part to help people in part to make sure people know
14 that that technology exists, so people who have
15 particular flooding issues through their driveway,
16 through a front door, you basically, it's like a
17 sandbag that's easier to store because you can empty
18 the water out and refill it in advance of the flood.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And we thank you
21 for it, you did give that to my district as well as
22 some pumps and we are appreciative of that.

23 ROHIT AGGAWALA: The sump pumps that we started
24 distributing in certain circumstances, we have flood
25 alarms. So, just like you have a smoke alarm, we

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1 would encourage anybody who lives in a basement
2 apartment, you can get a flood censor so that your
3 constituent wouldn't have woken up with a surprise.
4 She would have heard the alarm to let her know when
5 flooding is starting. Pursuant to a Local Law, my
6 agency is working now on a study around backwater
7 preventors, so that is; I will have a lot more to say
8 in a couple of months on that score, certainly before
9 the end of the year.
10

11 So there are a number of things and finally of
12 course it's about getting flood insurance, which I
13 know is a financial challenge to some but
14 nonetheless, it is just a reality that the city is
15 not going to be able to protect everybody in the near
16 term. We are working as hard as we can to develop a
17 comprehensive approach but it will take time, there
18 is no way around it.

19 Uhm, you asked about catch basin -

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Alright -

21 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Oh.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: One point on that.

23 There are some homeowners who are residents that have
24 flood insurance and were told by the insurance
25 carrier that they would not be covering it.

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1
2 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Well, that is something that I
3 think perhaps we should have a follow-on conversation
4 about. We have heard of complaints like that and of
5 course it is the state that deals with enforcing the
6 behavior among insurance companies but I think that's
7 something I'd be happy to talk with you and your
8 staff about.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you.

10 ROHIT AGGARWALA: You asked about catch basin
11 cleaning. So, at the beginning of last Fiscal Year,
12 so last summer, DEP implemented something I think is
13 really very good, which is a risk-based approach to
14 catch basin inspections and cleanings. So, rather
15 than treating all 160,000 of our catch basins as
16 equally likely to get clogged or equally impactful if
17 they do get clogged. We actually developed a risk
18 assessment. So, some catch basins that are on high
19 traffic streets or near a subway station or
20 something, so we think they might be likely to get
21 clogged very quickly or they would be really
22 impactful if they flood. They are actually getting
23 checked every six months. Others that are for
24 location reasons or others less likely to get clogged
25 or less impactful if they do are on a three-year

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1 cycle. That's a way that we optimize the impact of
2 the labor hours that it takes physically to go around
3 and check these. In advance of a storm, so whenever
4 the flashflood program is activated, there are about
5 2,000 high priority catch basins that are allocated
6 among DEP, DOT and Sanitation. And so, when the
7 flashflood program is activated by the Office of
8 Emergency Management as it was on Thursday morning
9 the 28th actually pretty early, I think 8:00 a.m..
10 Crews go out and check those high priority locations
11 and to the extent that it's possible, we will go and
12 clean them if they are clogged.

14 One of the things that I think we are always
15 eager to remind people of is there is a difference
16 between clogging and covering, right? So, if a catch
17 basin fills up with material, the top has to be
18 opened up. It has to get scooped out. That requires
19 a special truck. Only DEP can do that.

20 What often happens especially in the middle of a
21 storm and I know several places in the city where
22 this happened on the 29th, that when the rain
23 started, Sanitation street sweepers had done their
24 job to catch basins were fine. All of that water,
25 especially during the autumn brings leaves, covers

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1 over, mats over the catch basins and then you start
2 getting flooding. Of course, when we find out about
3 that, we do dispatch crews in the middle of a storm
4 as long as it's safe and immediately right after to
5 clear those spaces but I also know of several
6 instances and maybe even one or two people here who
7 went out in the middle of the storm, identified
8 locations like that. All it takes is a rake and I
9 think one opportunity we may have is to think about
10 how we get New Yorkers to do that kind of work that
11 the reality is, there is no way with massive
12 increases in resources that DEP could respond in real
13 time to honor the 60,000 catch basins around the
14 city.

16 So, I think there is something around the
17 distributed response. And then you mentioned the
18 meshes, which you know you and I spoke about the
19 weekend of the 30th, 31st. You know those
20 construction meshes and these are - this is actually
21 kind of a lining that basically prevents grit from
22 going into the catch basins. It's particularly, I
23 believe, required in the separately sewered areas of
24 the city including your district. And it is actually
25 a state DEC requirement for construction.

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3 So, our plan is actually, we need to talk to DEC
4 because one of the things that we think is probably
5 necessary is a requirement on their part that the
6 construction contracts include a commitment by the
7 contractor when there is a flashflood warning to
8 remove those meshes. It is not something that DEP
9 installs. It's not even something the DEP mandates.
10 It is actually a statewide, so we will talk to them.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you for that
12 and thank you Chair.

13 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Thank you. Thank you
14 Council Member. We are joined by Council Member
15 Narcisse. Happy to have her here with us and I
16 recognize Council Member Nurse for questions and we
17 didn't start the clock right away with the last, so
18 yeah, there was actually time there but you know it's
19 Majority Whip, so come on. And we recognize Council
20 Member Nurse for questions.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: First of all
22 congratulations and welcome. I want to thank you
23 Commissioner for just the proactive communications
24 you had at least directly with me with regards to
25 heavy rain events in Bushwick and just, just how
available and accessible you have been to hear all of

1 my gripes. And I do appreciate the short-term
2 mitigation efforts that you all have been putting in
3 in the recurring areas that are getting hit in
4 Bushwick. However, you know and I've said this at
5 other hearings, we're just at this point where people
6 are demanding answers. I'm aware of what you're
7 saying because I'm here at these hearings but I think
8 at this point, what we're looking for is a timeline
9 of when there will even be a proposal for what to do
10 and I don't know - it's hard to understand. I
11 understand that each one is - is neighborhood that
12 has this type of recurring flooding might have
13 specific things that are unique to it but Bushwick
14 needs to know where we are in that pipeline. Are we
15 neighborhood 20? Are we neighborhood 3? Is it in
16 two years we will get a vision of a proposal? Just
17 anything more concretely would be really helpful
18 because we are the one's getting yelled at. We are
19 the one's getting the brunt of the communications and
20 the answers are not easy to communicate. And so, we
21 need just a little more transparency in terms of
22 where we are in these projects.

24 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Council Member, look it's a
25 very fair question. Certainly for your specific

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1 issue with the flooding on Knicker Bocker that we've
2 uh that you and I have walked through and we've spent
3 a lot of time. There is active work going on right
4 now around what the alternatives could be, so I think
5 we would have more to share with your constituents,
6 certainly before the end of the year.
7

8 I don't know if that includes a firm timetable,
9 right but we will certainly have more to say -

10 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Will it include what the -
11 all the options are?

12 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Certainly, it will include the
13 options that we are exploring.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay, is there any funding
15 dedicated to specifically to addressing the flooding
16 in Bushwick?

17 ROHIT AGGARWALA: I think once we figure out
18 exactly what the preferred option is, there is, so it
19 was alluded to I forget in I think one of the Chairs
20 opening remarks, \$2 billion that was set aside in the
21 new normal report. That is a pool of money that we
22 could potentially draw from. We will have to figure
23 out where to pull that funding together from but you
24 know realistically, first, we have to figure out what
25 we're trying to do.

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1 For what it's worth, I'll say in part because of
2 our ability to have recourse to the water bill and in
3 part because DEP has focused so much on our ability
4 to do procurement and deliver capital. Capital
5 availability is not our main constraint. Our main
6 constraint is much more around the ability to design
7 these projects at once. I think you're all at the
8 City Council familiar with the challenges that New
9 York City has had in attracting and retaining civil
10 engineers, which is not just about the city. I hear
11 that from every AE consultant out there, right? That
12 that's one our key bottlenecks.
13

14 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you for that. I do
15 think that you know I really recommend that the city
16 you know engage in louder outreach on communicating
17 that the timelines are far. Because you know the
18 water barriers are nice if you have a house but I'm
19 not seeing them being used actively and we appreciate
20 them and it feels like something but when it actually
21 is happening in real time, it's not as effective.
22 So, I think we need to have more robust
23 communications from the agencies and the
24 Administration, like hey, we don't have answers for
25 you for two to three years. And because people need

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1 to know that when they're investing in our
2 communities, because it's not just – for us, it's not
3 just Knicker Bocker, we have public housing. We have
4 you know like a 20, you know a 10, 15 block radius
5 where people are just whole floors just useless.
6 Uhm, okay, I'll move on.
7

8 Another question I have is kind of in relation to
9 the Resolution uhm, and I've asked about this a
10 little bit before. Does DEP formerly review land use
11 or housing applications involving city subsidies that
12 will be constructed within future high risk flood
13 zones?

14 ROHIT AGGARWALA: I will need to see whether DEP
15 has any role within that process. I believe that
16 would be undertaken by City Planning but I will have
17 to get back to you on that.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. Thank you Chair.

19 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Council
20 Member Nurse. Next up is Council Member Carr.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you Chairs Gennaro
22 and Krishnan for this crucial hearing. Commissioner,
23 it's good to see you and your colleagues all here. I
24 just want to start by thanking DEP for its
25 transformational investments, whether it's the storm

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1 separate sewer infrastructure, replacing septic and
2 combined sewer over the last 30 years and of course,
3 landmark Blue Belt investments that have been just
4 transformational for my communities, even with
5 current challenges.
6

7 I just have three questions that I want to focus
8 in on. The first is with respect to the Sea Wall
9 project. First forecast for that, it was going to
10 start in 2018 and finish in 2021 and obviously that
11 has been a mistake and I know they're about to take
12 over some Blue Belt creations from DEP near Father
13 Capodanno. So, I'd love to hear your perspective on
14 where things are and what needs to happen for this to
15 move forward. Additionally, I know that there is
16 some Blue Belt project expansions contemplated for
17 South Beach and Grasmere but not yet in the capital
18 plan. I know you talked about that in the round but
19 love to hear more specifics about you know when that
20 might come about.

21 And then finally, with respect to the Westerly
22 Willow Brook Clove Lake drainage study that's
23 concluding this month and the options that are going
24 to be presented from that, I'd love to know a
25 timeline of when we could start to see a timeline for

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1 something, in particular for Horizon Village which
2 has been devastated twice in the last 20 years by
3 storms. Thank you.

4
5 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Alright, thanks Council Member.
6 I apologize, I will have to get back to you on both
7 Clove Lake and South Beach. I just don't have those
8 timelines at my fingertips. I know as you say, the
9 Clove Lake study is winding down but I have not been
10 briefed on what it's going to say yet, so I don't
11 have any sneak peak to offer. I'm sorry but happy to
12 give you one in private.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Sure.

14 ROHIT AGGARWALA: On the Southshore Sea Wall,
15 that is something that has occupied a fair bit of my
16 attention. Personally, I've spoken to congresswoman
17 Molliotakis about it personally. The DEC
18 Commissioner Basil Seggos and I have convened a
19 number of meetings with the Army Corp, with Parks,
20 with National Parks. There are a number of agencies
21 involved which is part of the problem, right and I
22 say that as an agency, so we are sometimes part of
23 the problem as well but the more agencies, yeah but
24 especially the more levels of government, the more
25 things drag on.

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1
2 The good news is the first phase really is on the
3 verge of issuing a contract. Again, I believe we've
4 got somebody from the Army Corp here so I won't make
5 news for them. You could ask them but I will simply
6 assure you that getting that project underway has
7 occupied a lot of my attention. A lot of
8 Commissioner Seggos's attention.

9 I know Colonel Young at the — both Colonel Young
10 and Colonel Lloyd have been personally involved at
11 the Army Corp, so we are on it. What I will also say
12 and I think I have learned a great deal from the
13 problems that project has faced as we should apply to
14 the HAT study, right? We need to think about the
15 HATs as being the Southshore of Staten Island project
16 times 30, right?

17 And so, we have had issues with hazardous waste,
18 right as you know there's a site there that's got
19 radioactive waste that New York City has not actually
20 got a track record of doing cleanups for. So, we are
21 in a very thorny discussion with the federal and
22 state governments about how to allocate
23 responsibility for that. We've had a very big issue
24 that has caused significant delays and again, I think
25 this is a situation in which everybody has been

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1 working hard and everybody has been working in good
2 faith but because the inland work is what's called a
3 betterment. The city is going to pay for it but
4 also, the city has to design it. We have actually
5 spent more than two years going back and forth with
6 us sending them drawings and them sending them back.
7 And again, I don't mean to say this as an attack or a
8 criticism on the Corp. I think they are working in
9 good faith but everybody does things slightly
10 differently.
11

12 So, my agency has a really good track record of
13 doing very big construction projects. We don't do
14 our designs in exactly the same way as the Army Corp
15 does. And so, one of the things that was in as
16 Elijah alluded to, our recommendations and our input
17 into the Army Corp's HAT study and something frankly
18 I've begun to talk to talk to our congressional
19 delegation about, with respect to the upcoming Water
20 Resources and Defense Authorization Act, which
21 happens every two years in congress, WRDA, uhm is
22 actually about expanding the mission of HATs, so that
23 not because we need the feds to pay more. I think
24 New York City should pay its fair share but because
25 that division of design work is a killer and if we

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1 think about HATs which is going to have not only
2 multi-climate hazards with inland flooding that it
3 has to address, sunny day flooding that it's going to
4 have to address from sea level rise, but also things
5 like recreation parks access, access to ferry's,
6 things like. The HATs project is going to be some of
7 the most complex waterfront work imaginable. And if
8 we wind up in a situation in which there are multiple
9 agencies trying to design it together, that is a
10 recipe for delay that will add multiple decades to
11 what is already a multiple decades problem.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you. Let's catch up
14 offline about that. That's very important. Thank
15 you Chairs.

16 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Thank you. Thank you
17 Council Member Carr. I recognize Council Member
18 Restler for questions.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you very much
20 Chair Gennaro, it's good to have you back and thank
21 you to you and Chair Krishnan for your leadership on
22 this hearing. It could not be more pressing and
23 important and thank you to the Administration
24 officials for joining us today.

25

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1 I'd like to just begin by building off of Chair
2 Krishnan's final comments about how we can anticipate
3 these PEGs to impact resiliency efforts across the
4 city. Commissioner, do you think you can
5 realistically achieve the kind of ambitions that
6 you've set out with 15 percent PEGs over your head
7 and if the other panelists would like to comment on
8 how devastating these draconian cuts would be on your
9 ability to effectively do your work, we would welcome
10 any insights that you have to offer.
11

12 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Council Member, I'll just start
13 by reiterating, because our – because DEP's funding,
14 so the funding for stormwater is water, utility and
15 we could save a ton of money and it still can't be
16 used for other city purposes of course. DEP has not
17 been subject to the PEG, so stormwater resilience is
18 not effected by the PEG. We are subject to the
19 hiring freeze and we are working with OMB in the
20 hopes of getting exemptions from those from the
21 hiring freeze and there is this process around OTPS
22 spending that has been frozen. And so, we're trying
23 to figure out how to unfreeze key categories there.
24
25

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1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Anything else you'd like
3 to add about how you can navigate these extraordinary
4 cuts?

5 ELIJAH HUTCHINSON: Similar to what Parks also
6 said, we're in the process with OMB in figuring this
7 all out, so.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Uhm, you know I just
9 want to be clear. Climate change remains the single
10 greatest threat to the people of New York City. We
11 have to be deepening these investments. The prospect
12 that across-the-board deep cuts could impact our
13 ability to make these necessary resiliency
14 investments and frankly much, much more is
15 indefensible. And I greatly hope that the Mayor and
16 the OMB Director will recognize that this is an area
17 that must be spared from any potential cuts.

18 Just building on Council Member Nurse's line of
19 questioning. Similarly, I think we're looking for
20 clarity on when we're going to see more comprehensive
21 planning that can realistically provide protection
22 for our communities and my recollection is that
23 PlaNYC requires - we're now calling it PlanNYC again,
24 so PlaNYC, PlanNYC?

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1
2 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Oh, I prefer PlaNYC if you
3 don't mind but I also have a silent a at the end of
4 my name.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I know the old OLTPS
6 days was PlaNYC, I just was unsure where we were.
7 So, under PlaNYC, we'll go with that. DEP is
8 required to release the stormwater flooding
9 adaptation plan by 2024. And I want to understand,
10 will this plan include target improvements for
11 specific areas that the city knows well? Flood and
12 flood consistently?

13 What I certainly experience in Council District
14 33, which is waterfront district, is that it's the
15 areas that flood when it rains a little that are
16 absolutely decimated when it rains a lot and yet we
17 don't see improvements. We, with all due respect
18 Commissioner, I adore your staff. I spend time and
19 time again on the phone with them looking at sites.
20 They say they're going to make improvements. They're
21 never adequate and we continue to have enormous
22 challenges and I don't know if it's the reticence to
23 take on big lengthy capital projects that obviously
24 are very costly but we're not seeing the
25 interventions that are needed in the places on Dean

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1 Street and Borum Hill on through Ben Wall About and
2 South Williamsburg on Newland and Greenpoint. I
3 mean, these are the sites that everybody knows always
4 flood, 4th and along Carrol where Shahana and I
5 border. They flood constantly and yet I don't see
6 anything getting better. How do we shift? How do we
7 do better? Is that going to be laid out in this plan
8 next to your - How do I be a better advocate for my
9 neighborhoods to actually see the investments that we
10 need?
11

12 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Well, look Council Member, we
13 have been certainly for the last year and a half or
14 nearly two years now, we have been trying to shift
15 gears at DEP to really focus on resilience as the
16 driving force of a lot of our capital thinking.

17 For example, we released the rainfall ready
18 amounts last summer. That was new, right? That was
19 the result of a lot of work, some of it done at MOCEJ
20 under the previous administration but that was new.
21 We are now in the process among other things of using
22 those hot spots where we know there is flooding to
23 guide our capital prioritization, right? That is not
24 actually the way it has been done for generations at
25 DEP.

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1 So, you know much like bringing kind of data
2 driven rationality to how we do catch basin
3 inspections, we're beginning the process of bringing
4 that kind of risk or impact prioritization to how we
5 think about capital investments to address flooding.
6 Among the big things that is just about ready or
7 we're beginning to use it now but it has been a major
8 investment over the last year or two is building what
9 we call an all-types model. So, we now have, I won't
10 call it a digital twin, it's not quite that fancy,
11 but really for the first time, we now have a model of
12 how all of the sewers interconnect. That's really
13 important because what we know first of all it's all
14 interconnected and so, among the things that we are
15 now just at the early stages of being able to do is
16 understand well, if there's flooding down here, the
17 fastest most cost-effective way to address it might
18 not be there. It might be upstream because all the
19 water up here is flowing down here.

21 It may also be that if there's flooding up here,
22 the real problem is a bottleneck down here. We now
23 have the ability to really understand that and one of
24 the things that I think we are coming to terms with
25 as an agency is the fact that until the weather

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1 started changing a couple of years ago, we didn't
2 need to worry about this that much. We just didn't
3 have to understand it right and now we do, and so we
4 are building the infrastructure, so that we can do
5 that kind of rational planning. Yes, we are working
6 towards a comprehensive strategy. I am not yet able
7 to tell you how detailed or specific that will be.
8 What I can tell you is that we are working on it with
9 a large team, with a lot of interborough and in fact
10 interagency work going on. It is something that is
11 one of my top priorities. It is not coincidental
12 that the Mayor asked me to be Chief Climate Officer
13 and Commissioner at DEP uhm at the same time. It's
14 precisely to make sure that we are fully integrating
15 DEP into this and of course, we will be bringing, we
16 will be standing up the spiro of coastal resilience.
17 In part because one of the things we've realized and
18 not realized but one of the things we are acting on,
19 is the reality that the first place that title flows
20 go is down the drain and one of the things which we
21 certainly saw on the 29th, one of the issues that
22 caused even more flooding than that massive
23 rainstorm, the second most intense rainstorm in the
24 city's recorded history brought us, was the fact that
25

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1 the hour of most intense rain from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m.
2
3 unfortunately took place at high tide.

4 And so, we had a number of parts of the city
5 where our outflows, which otherwise would have
6 drained water out of the city into the harbor,
7 actually were backed up because the tide had risen so
8 high that they were covered over. So, among the
9 things we have to work on and I'm sorry Chair, but I
10 want to give a complete answer.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: He's giving me a long
12 time. I thought that Chair Krishnan promised me
13 double the time today. I must have misunderstood.

14 ROHIT AGGARWALA: But among the things that we
15 are working on is how to accelerate the tide gates so
16 that we can prevent flooding from a current because
17 water is backing up, which is something for example
18 that happens regularly unfortunately in the
19 Rockaways.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Look and this is
21 interconnected to some of the proposals that were
22 included in the HAT study. I will just say, I
23 appreciated the Army Corp engaging with us as
24 communities across the city in a quite open and
25 thoughtful way. I could never understand what the

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1 city's position was throughout this process and so, I
2 struggled to understand what the city was advocating
3 for. My community was organized. We were pushing.
4 We were very concerned about 15-foot walls that would
5 you know create a back up affect and cut our
6 communities off from our waterfronts but I'd really
7 like to better understand and maybe with new
8 leadership, we can have those conversations in the
9 Mayor's Office to have clarity on what you all are
10 advocating for. And I'll just say in closing because
11 I've gone over time, in part because you gave such a
12 thoughtful and lengthy response, uh, I appreciated
13 that driven approach to identifying where we need to
14 make the capital improvements to improve our
15 infrastructure. I don't have the data but I know the
16 lived experience in my neighbors and I can tell you
17 the places in my community that are hit time and
18 again and again, and we will provide that list once
19 again to DEP and be the squeakiest wheel that I know
20 how to be but we desperately want to see attention
21 and intervention in these sites that are problematic
22 sites.
23
24
25

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3 So, look for an email from me very shortly but
4 you know hope we can work together to make some
5 improvements in our waterfront district. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks so much Council
7 Member Restler. A lot of leeway there on that one.
8 Council Member Holden.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you Chairs and I
10 want Lincoln Restler time also.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yeah, once he starts,
12 slippery slope.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: I'm on both Committees,
14 so we should get extra time. Thank you Chairs and
15 thank you Commissioner. Two questions regarding
16 stormwater runoff. One problem, I have a lot of
17 utility work in my district, many blocks and I
18 brought this up to DEP many times, especially
19 National Grid. They're putting, replacing gas lines
20 on the sidewalk. When they restore the sidewalk,
21 they pave the whole thing, including the strip that's
22 not the property owners space. That's the city
23 space. It used to be a grass strip, now we have
24 concrete, which is counterproductive if we're doing
25 you know the bioswales or the rain gardens and then

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1 we're paving over blocks and blocks in districts
2 around Queens and throughout the city. That's one.

3
4 Where I do have pending legislation that would
5 actually define that space that you can't pave over
6 it. It hasn't been drafted yet, I'm waiting several
7 weeks or months but I think that could be part of
8 your plan to mitigate some of the - because obviously
9 the stormwater runoff that we're experiencing now, in
10 my district it goes into the New Town Creek and we
11 know what that's like, the New Town Creek is another
12 story but uhm, the second thing. The Yards Text
13 Amendment of 2008 that this Council passed, it's
14 really not being enforced properly by DOB. I see
15 every construction project in my district, almost
16 every one of them I have to address. Meaning
17 somebody's not paying attention at DOB. If they're
18 permitting this you know they're allowing it. I send
19 inspectors down there from DOB and most of the time,
20 they come back and say they didn't find anything
21 wrong. And I know this so I have to send another
22 inspector and depending on which DOB inspector they
23 send; I get lucky sometimes. Most of the time I'm
24 spinning my wheels. That means and this is by the
25 way, there have been articles about this since 2008

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1 about how the DOB is not really enforcing it. So, we
2 need to pull all this together. My question would be
3 number one, on the Yards Text Amendment, can DEP
4 actually help out and kind of guide DOB? Because I
5 don't know again if they're really educating their
6 inspectors properly and I'll speak to the
7 Commissioner of DOB also but question one would be,
8 would you get involved in that in helping? Because
9 that, I'm telling you, almost every project that I'm
10 seeing in my district they're paving over because
11 they want to park more cars and they're putting it in
12 everywhere. They're putting the cars in front of
13 their stoops, in their doorways, which I'm trying to
14 get you know DOB to enforce that. That's almost
15 impossible and I'm actually reaching out to the Fire
16 Department because that seems to be, you're blocking
17 egress you know. So, all these questions, we need
18 help from your agency or somebody's help on this.

20 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Thank you Council Member. Uhm,
21 look I will - so the issue of the Text Amendment
22 Enforcement is something that I certainly know is a
23 challenge. I think it is worth having a conversation
24 that I would be happy to engage with Commissioner
25 Oddo about in terms of how we think perhaps

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1
2 differently about enforcement. I don't know whether
3 that would require a legislative change or an
4 interagency agreement. We would need to think about
5 how we resource something like that because we - you
6 know I think one of the things frankly that tends to
7 happen is that we assign tasks based on who has
8 resources or who has expertise as opposed to which
9 agency is really focused on ensuring that a bad thing
10 doesn't happen and there may need to be some
11 realignment there.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: But just on dealing with
13 inspectors that don't know the law, that's one thing.
14 It's another thing because I'm always talking to
15 homeowners and they're complaining, they're getting
16 flooded. Their sewers are backing up and I say,
17 "well, look at your neighbors." I said, part of the
18 problem is, if you look at your, even your property,
19 you've paved over 90 or 100 percent of your yard and
20 that's causing it. Well no- I said, it's over
21 development but we're concreting everything. We're
22 cementing grass but when the city actually does it,
23 when the city participates in it like I mentioned
24 about the grass strip, it may not seem like a lot but
25 when you look at entire blocks of my district and I

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1 photographed this and I did give it to DEP. I said,
2 let's do something about this. Let's stop doing
3 this. Let's put more grass and again if it takes
4 legislation I'll do it. However, it shouldn't really
5 because it's not really the property owners space.
6 Most of the properties, it ends at the sidewalk and
7 then you have that strip. It could be four feet. It
8 could be more in certain areas. So, if we can
9 coordinate that and kind of quickly because they're
10 replacing you know miles and miles every day and it's
11 National Grid and Con Ed that are doing it. And each
12 time I talk to them, they say, you know we don't know
13 anything about that. We'll pave and they're paving
14 it and it's not their property, it's the city's
15 property but we can control that. Thanks.

17 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: And I just want to jump in
18 for a second. I just want to give Bob a little
19 attitude because this is an important question and I
20 think we all see it and so, I'm going to give him a
21 little attitude here and he also sits next to me at
22 the Council so you know.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah, I can harass you
24 sometimes on that but no, this is important.

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CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: So, take as long as you
want to give an answer to that.

ROHIT AGGARWALA: Uhm, well look, on this one, I
will confess it's not something that I have an answer
to off the top of my head but I'm happy to work with
you. It's something that I've heard in the past.
How we enforce construction rules across the city.
Frankly we mention in PlaNYC as something that we've
got to have happen. It's something that is part of
the City of Yes for Carbon Neutrality that I believe
coming before the City Council very soon. Uhm, but
on the specific issue of what Con Ed and National
Grid might be doing on the sidewalks, I will follow
up with you.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you. Thank you
Commissioner.

CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Thank you Council Member
Holden. I recognize Council Member Velázquez.

COUNCIL MEMBER VELAZQUEZ: Hi and thank you
Commissioner. Thank you for your work. So,
listening to my colleagues and their questioning, I
can't help but ask you a lot of these would be
facilitated better with Borough Commissioners and so,
why hasn't DEP hired any Borough Commissioners yet?

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1
2 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Thank you Council Member. So,
3 the position of Borough Commissioners was actually
4 legislated by the City Council, I believe, two years
5 ago. So, we have been in the process of getting
6 ready and hiring and recruiting and with the hiring
7 freeze, we're a little bit stuck right now but I'm
8 hoping to work through that because I agree with you.
9 Among the themes that we've heard here is better
10 communication and that is something that you know I
11 have my Deputy Commissioner for Public Affairs and
12 Communications has been doing a great job but is
13 trying to build her team and we could use those extra
14 resources.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VELAZQUEZ: Do we expect that to
16 be done within this calendar year or?

17 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Again, there's the hiring
18 freeze right now and OMB is working through the
19 exception requests and I don't have any - I don't
20 have a timeline I can give you right now.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VELAZQUEZ: Perfect, thank you for
22 that. Uhm, you had mentioned earlier the DEP risk
23 assessment. Is there a way that we as Council
24 Members can get what that looks like in our district?
25 I know certain parts of my district, every single

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1 time that there is flooding and you've seen it, not
2 just the flooding but also the sink holes that happen
3 afterwards specifically in my district because of the
4 construction in the 20's. Is there a way to get that
5 information to us?
6

7 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Well, one of the things that I
8 - you know again with a more structured approach to
9 outreach that I would love to be able to do is ensure
10 that and Council Member Restler's question kind of
11 incorporated this. Ensure that our rainfall ready
12 map that we're really relying on incorporates all of
13 the kind of lived experience out there. You know
14 I've been very pleased when I go out, you know as I
15 did with you in your district and with others and
16 across the city and we talked to constituents who
17 have experienced flooding. Our map is usually
18 accurate but it's not 100 percent necessarily and
19 before we make decisions on it, we'd like to
20 incorporate all of that. I would like to do that in
21 a systematic way. We haven't started that yet and I
22 think frankly it's kind of just how we sequence the
23 work. I really cannot stress enough how daunting the
24 challenge of the city's stormwater management is. It
25 is a breathtakingly complex system and so, right now

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1 we've prioritized looking at a number of known a very
2 finite number, I will point out. Number of locations
3 that we think typify the kind of problems that we see
4 much more broadly around the city to identify how
5 some of the solutions might work, so that we can
6 figure out by extrapolation what would a citywide
7 response actually involve. That's really step one,
8 which is in part why I, you know frankly had to hedge
9 a little bit with Council Member Restler's question
10 because I don't know how precise next years plan is
11 going to be but it is certainly going to be a step in
12 the right direction.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VELAZQUEZ: I appreciate that
15 because I have so many local groups who are willing
16 and able to come and help with the cleaning at least
17 of the catch basins on the surface area and so if we
18 can just find those areas that we need to target
19 especially on days that we know are going to be
20 significant with significant rainfall, then we want
21 to be ready as well. And if we can just target those
22 areas as a community, we can actually spare a lot of
23 the work that you guys would have to do as well.

24 So, that way like, we got to work together and
25 this is a pathway to that. You had mentioned flood

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1 alarms as a recommendation to Council Member Brooks-
2 Powers. Is there an opportunity there to launch a
3 citywide program to cover for families that have a
4 significant low-income bracket to where we're
5 actually like saving their lives? Do you see a
6 benefit for this?
7

8 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Uhm, well, so the good news is,
9 these are not very expensive devices, right. I don't
10 have a number off the top of my head but we're not
11 talking about a \$50 or a \$100 item. And DEP has some
12 that we are very happy to give away. We haven't done
13 that in a systematic citywide way but it is something
14 worth exploring.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VELAZQUEZ: Thank you. That's all
16 my questions.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks so much Council
18 Member and now, we have Council Member Narcisse.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you Chairs. Good
20 afternoon everyone and by the way, you're one of the
21 important agencies in my life because I represent the
22 46th District. It's been a problem for us even worse
23 ever since Sandy. Every little rain, all the calls
24 that I'm getting and usually I have to be on the
25 street riding the storm to go around and visit folks

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1 in my district which is Garrison Beach, Burgan Beach,
2 Canarsie, Mill Basin area, so you know where I'm
3 talking about right? So, uhm, in my District, it's
4 every day. When I see rain, I have to cross my
5 little finger. So, what can we do? What's the plan
6 to ease our pain in this District? Because we're
7 talking about sewage backup. I witness feces coming
8 through peoples home. So, I'm wondering where we at?

10 And before we get to that answer, we have
11 infrastructure money out there from the federal
12 level. How many proposals that you have forth in
13 front of the federal to make sure that we get our
14 fair share in the City of New York?

15 ROHIT AGGARWALA: I will ask Elijah to give you
16 some of the numbers around federal but let me take a
17 couple - as I said earlier, one of our challenges
18 with federal money is and frankly I've had this
19 conversation with a number of members of our
20 congressional delegation is that they believe that
21 while if New York City is going to get or New York
22 States going to get x-amount of money, New York City
23 is about half the state, so we're going to get about
24 half that, which is not at all true.

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1 So, on the money, there are three flavors of
2 money coming from the federal government. One is
3 delivered through Block Grants right and that's a
4 formula that goes out to cities, the CDBG, the
5 Community Development Block Grant money. That we get
6 by formula. What we do, there's a coordinated
7 interagency effort that prioritizes how that CDBG
8 resilience money is going to be invested. And we
9 have been very successful in quickly getting federal
10 approval to spend that money. It's coordinated
11 through the Deputy Mayor of Operations team.
12 Examples of the work that we do a lot of it has
13 actually gone to NYCHA to help fund a lot of the
14 resilience work and flood protection work at NYCHA
15 facilities. So, that's been very successful. I'll
16 see if we can get back you either right now or later
17 with a number on how many proposals we have out to
18 the federal government but where the federal
19 government has a competitive program that they are
20 administering, we do very well generally, right. We
21 have large numbers because we can make an investment
22 that impacts a lot of people. We generally look good
23 on a cost-benefit basis, even though our construction
24 costs are higher.
25

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1 So, when the federal government administers a
2 program, we do well. Where we lose is when the state
3 administers a program because as I said earlier, they
4 often put restrictions on either what we can apply
5 for, so there is a huge amount of water
6 infrastructure money from the federal government that
7 the state has determined New York City should not
8 have access to at all. So, they are by agency
9 discretion, they have denied us access to what we
10 think we could get about \$1 billion in federal money
11 for investments in our water infrastructure which I
12 think is unfair. We have tried to make that point to
13 them but they have not seen fit to change anything.

14 So, I will say we are working as hard as we can
15 to maximize federal money and I think where the deck
16 is not stacked against us, we're doing pretty well.

17 Uhm, you asked about sewer backups and -

18 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Because I want to know
19 are there any plans to upgrade those infrastructures
20 in those areas that I'm talking about because we are
21 suffering there.

22 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Well, as I said earlier, we are
23 a year into what will be a multi-year project to
24 figure out how to make our stormwater management
25

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1 infrastructure resilient to the kind of weather that
2 we now have. It started with having the data that
3 allows us to know where these things are happening.
4 As I mentioned earlier, we built a model, so we
5 really now can understand how the sewer system works
6 so we can target interventions.
7

8 We are working right now on a number of known
9 locations that are chronic problems because those are
10 archetypes for what we might have to do across the
11 city and we are for example, looking at how we expand
12 our cloud burst infrastructure. How we think about a
13 citywide approach to Blue Belts. All of that is
14 going on. Unfortunately, we're only a year and a
15 half into it and as a result, we're kind of at the
16 point where there is a lot of engineering work. We
17 don't have that much we can share yet, so I don't
18 have a clear answer.

19 One thing I will point out because you mentioned
20 sewer backups, we actually are - DEP has done a
21 pretty good job over the last decade of reducing
22 sewer backups. We have fewer than half as many sewer
23 backups as we did a decade ago. It's still too many.
24 One thing that we have become aware of is that
25 actually more than half of the sewer backups that are

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1 reported are not due to what's going on in the sewer.

2 So, when a sewer backup is reported, we send a truck,

3 which costs us a significant amount of time and

4 money.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: You've been pretty good

6 by the way. You've been responding but this area

7 particular 46, we're now talking about Canarsie,

8 Bergen, Canarsie getting a little better but you have

9 Bergen Beach, you have Mill Basin area, that is

10 awful, awful.

11 ROHIT AGGARWALA: I understand but one of the

12 things that I think we're going to have start

13 educating homeowners about is, I think we have

14 increasing evidence that there are homeowners who are

15 unknowingly causing their own sewer backups because

16 what we see is a lot of situations in which the rain

17 gutter that takes rain off of the roof, is going

18 straight into the sewer line and in a major rain

19 storm like we had on the 29th, that kind of pressure

20 behind the sewer connection to the street is actually

21 liable to cause the water to backup into the home.

22 And I think this is what we are seeing with the

23 half of all sewer backup complaints where we send a

24 truck, there is no evidence that the sewer was ever

25

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1 backed up, so there should not have been a sewer
2
3 backup from the main sewer but it was probably behind
4 the connection because you've got a rain gutter
5 connection. And in parts of your neighbor- in parts
6 of your district, we have a separate storm, sewer and
7 sanitary sewer in those parts of the city, it is
8 actually illegal to have a connection from your roof
9 into the sanitary sewer. There should be no
10 stormwater into a sanitary sewer.

11 So, it is something that I would like to work
12 towards an educational effort on. The good news is
13 disconnecting a rain gutter from the sewer pipe,
14 which again is necessary to do by law in an MS4 area
15 is still a really good and neighborly thing to do in
16 a CSO area. Happily it's very cheap and it's the
17 kind of thing many of you have done rain barrel
18 giveaways. The right answer for something like that
19 is cut off the gutter so it doesn't go into the sewer
20 anymore. Put a rain barrel underneath it and then
21 you've got the benefit of storing rain for your
22 garden and having it disperse very gently as the rain
23 barrel is designed to do.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And Chair, I know I'm
25 pushing it but I heard about 160,000 catch basins

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1 throughout the city and you have about 2,000 that's
2 kind of like a high priority area. So, do you have a
3 list of where the high priority areas are? And in
4 the catch basin part, I want to find out I mean where
5 strategically you have catch basin in my area because
6 I have seen water flooding, because every - if you
7 don't want to check it out on my Facebook, I have to
8 check my district up and down because people are
9 calling me left and right. I cannot sleep when these
10 heavy rain. So, when it's a storm forget it. So, I
11 need your help Commissioner. I don't want to squeeze
12 because I know I run out of my time but I need your
13 help in my district.

15 ROHIT AGGARWALA: I'd be happy to share - we'll
16 get back to you with a list of those priority catch
17 basins that get checked during a flashflood advisory
18 that are in your district. Happy to share that data.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you. Thank you
20 so much.

21 ELIJAH HUTCHINSON: I did want to add on the
22 federal funding, uhm the city since January of 2022
23 has applied for over \$2 billion of infrastructure
24 funds from the federal government and that includes
25 several different agencies, like EPA, NOA, FEMA,

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1 through the Brick Program, through the Hazard
2 Mitigation Grant program. And so there is a pipeline
3 of applications that we've submitted. We've had
4 through brick funding awarded. We've had through
5 other programs hundreds of millions of dollars
6 awarded and I know that within Canarsie, we have the
7 climate strong communities work in which we're
8 specifically targeting that work so that we can scope
9 it with community members and identify what those
10 potential projects would be and really asking
11 residents what they think what might be successful
12 projects but having that engagement process
13 specifically tailored to federal grant programs and
14 state funding sources, so that we can end with an
15 application to get more resources.
16

17 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I appreciate you and
18 I'm hoping so we can do some seminars together.
19 Something got to be done because those people
20 actually in need because like I said last week again
21 I had to go all over Garrison Beach and seeing
22 people's houses under the flood, that's unfair. And
23 having the backups from the sewage system. That's
24 not healthy. As a nurse I'm going to tell you, not
25 healthy at all alright. Thank you.

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3 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Thank you Council Member
Narcisse.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: You're most welcome. And
6 then it's just I have two quick questions and my
7 esteemed Co-Chair has a question or two, let me just
8 get to that and then you can have lunch, you know.
9 Are you drinking enough? Just like have you taken a
10 sip out of that thing recently? Just like - okay,
11 good you worry me a little bit. Anyway, let's start
12 with Rit.

13 Now in your testimony you talked about you know
14 the help that would be most welcome from the Council
15 regarding dispute of projects and if you could just
16 kind of expand on that. Like, what is it that we
17 could do in that regard? I mean it's not very
18 compelling but just want to know what it is we could
19 help with.

20 ROHIT AGGARWALA: I will say I don't have a
21 legislative proposal to offer. I just, I would ask
22 you all think about I guess, the way I see it, our
23 challenge is not, not wanting to do the right thing.
24 It is not even a lack of capital because once we have
25 you know projects identified, I have a \$31 billion

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1 ten-year capital plan at DEP. Capital is not really
2 the main constraint if we choose to prioritize it.
3 But as I mentioned, many of these projects like the
4 fastest possible timeline is six years, seven years,
5 right and I think if there's a place for us
6 collectively to figure out how to make government
7 work better, how to rise to the challenge of
8 resilience, it's asking ourselves how do we speed
9 that up? You know for example, one of the brilliant
10 things about -

12 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: So, what you're getting at
13 I think if there's a project proposed and it's going
14 to be, it's going to cause a lot of upheaval over a
15 lot of years, you got to push back on starting it
16 from the locals once it gets explained to them or?

17 ROHIT AGGARWALA: No, it's not even necessarily
18 that. I mean, I don't think we've had a lot of
19 instances where sewer or Blue Belt or cloudburst
20 projects have been delayed. You know in the popular
21 imagination, there's a lot that we blame
22 environmental impact statements on for, which is not
23 necessarily the issue here.

24 I'm just pointing out that what I spend my time
25 worrying about is not where's the 22nd project. It's

1
2 how do we push all of them through the pipeline as
3 quickly as possible?

4 Some of that is just about having really good
5 management and I could not be more proud of the work
6 that my agency has done in terms of managing its
7 procurement process, right. We've cut our
8 procurement times in half, just by good management
9 internally.

10 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Right.

11 ROHIT AGGARWALA: But there are ways that the
12 city does procurement. There are constraints on how
13 we do design. One of the things that I think is
14 fantastic about the climate strong communities work
15 is as Elijah just said, it's precisely designed to
16 get ready for when funding is available, right. We
17 have the practice that we don't invest in planning
18 money until capital dollars are identified. But in a
19 world where there's a lot of federal money out there
20 or something, with sometime like Climate Strong, what
21 we're able to do is go out and define projects, even
22 if we don't know exactly where the money's coming
23 from but kind of making the bet. But by the time the
24 year or two of design work is done, there's going to
25 be a pun of money that we could apply for, right.

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1 And that actually saves a lot of time and in fact,
2 increases your likelihood of getting some of these
3 grants because rarely does the federal or state
4 government put out a grant and say, "yeah, and tell
5 me in three years how you would like to spend this
6 money." They really want to know much sooner than
7 that.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Right, it sounds like kind
10 of an executive function or I'm missing something in
11 what you're -

12 ROHIT AGGARWALA: It is and obviously you know we
13 have to manage and I am certainly doing everything I
14 can to figure out how to manage my agency as Elijah
15 is, as Marit and Sue Donahue at the Parks Department
16 are. Everyday how to manage as aggressively and as
17 effectively as we can. I'm just -

18 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Yeah.

19 ROHIT AGGARWALA: As you said earlier Mr. Chair,
20 sharing the burden, so I appreciate that.

21 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Right, right, no, we can
22 certainly brainstorm about this over our next
23 breakfast, okay and thank you. Thank you Rit and for
24 Assistant Commissioner Larson. Getting back to Local
25 Law 31 of 2009 that I made reference to in my opening

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1 statement. You know the Administration is required
2 to submit an updated report on the comprehensive
3 wetlands protection strategy called for by this law.
4 However, no update on the strategy provided in 2012.
5 Okay, so 2012 was filed in compliance of the law but
6 nothing else has come forward since.
7

8 And rather than make you kind of swim. I mean
9 like if you have an answer fine. If it's one of
10 these things where uhm, you know you want to get back
11 to me on that or whatever and I'll make a note to Mr.
12 Cataldo and also my staff Nabie(SP?). You know this
13 is a law, it's on the books and it was passed in 2009
14 and you know the first submission made it on time and
15 then hasn't been heard from since and that's more
16 than a decade ago. I know you did the other things
17 with the wetlands, whatever it was but we didn't know
18 if that was - it wasn't earmarked as a compliance
19 document with the law. And so -

20 MARIT LARSON: Well, if I may I will just
21 reiterate I think what might have said earlier, that
22 the wetlands management framework really was a
23 building off an almost ten years of work after that
24 was inspired and included and identified in the
25 wetlands strategy that we then used as the foundation

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1 for the further roadmap focusing on New York City
2 Parks Wetlands in the Wetlands Management framework.

3 So, I will just – I just wanted to highlight that.

4 That many of the recommendations and including
5 addressing the need to develop better wetlands map
6 was something that we continue to work on through
7 getting USEPA funding and numerous grants over
8 consecutive years building up to that wetlands
9 management framework. So, glad to follow up.

10
11 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Yeah, and that's fine and
12 we certainly applaud that but uhm, we ordinarily you
13 know want the laws complied with in our own way and
14 not your own way and that's kind of you know. That's
15 just how we do it, you know but it looks like you got
16 all the ingredients there or whatever but it should
17 be filed as appropriate and uhm, you know again if
18 you'd follow up with a more detailed strategy on
19 doing that, like I said, I got Robert texting away
20 now and I got Nabie taking notes or whatever. So,
21 that's fine okay, I certainly appreciate that and to
22 close out this panel, my esteemed Co-Chair will do
23 that.

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks so much Chair
25 Gennaro. Actually before I go with my closing

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1 questions, we have been joined by Council Member
2 Gutierrez who I think has a question too, so I'll
3 turn it over to you.

4
5 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIERREZ: And I'll be brief, I
6 know you've been here a little bit. How you doing
7 Commissioner? Good to see you. I got to quickly
8 read through your testimony. I'll read it thoroughly
9 afterwards. I'm not going to bring up Knicker Bocker
10 because I think we talk about it often but I will be
11 following up with you on Knicker Bocker. I'm curious
12 about the project in South Jamaica with NYCHA in
13 collaboration. Now, I know the area in my district.
14 You know is not designated as an area with you know
15 potentially extreme flooding. Just based on your
16 testimony, I know that you know it doesn't have that
17 designation. My concern is Borinquen Houses. In
18 Williamsburg, uhm and this is more because of the
19 construction of the actually development, which is no
20 basement in any of the buildings and I really think
21 it's I don't know what the exact terminology is but
22 like kind of where it around Borinquen at floods but
23 the actual buildings flood. And so, every single
24 lobby, even if it's not even a cloud burst will
25 flood. And so, I'm curious what is the communication

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1 with NYCHA like? What is something that I can do in
2 this instance because it's not - I think the problem
3 is like the actual but it is you know water that
4 comes in from the streets as well as just like
5 typical rain water but you know they got some really
6 good coverage in the city about a month ago because
7 like this happens all the time and so, I'm just
8 curious what your communication with NYCHA looks like
9 overall in some of these like infrastructure
10 projects? And what are some - it's basically advice.
11 I need advice here and what are some of the things
12 that I can be elevating because it is a problem.

14 I mean, I represent Williamsburg Houses, it's the
15 oldest development in Brooklyn and it's just part of
16 this aging infrastructure that on its own is falling
17 apart and you know couple that with you know
18 excessive rainfall. It's problematic, so if you got
19 any advice for me, I would appreciate that and that's
20 it.

21 ROHIT AGGARWALA: Uhm, well, so look I will say I
22 think NYCHA has done a very good job of being very
23 serious about resilience. As with everything at
24 NYCHA, the resources are always far short of the
25 actual need but I think overall, if you look at the

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1 portfolio of NYCHA residences across the city. They
2 are so much better prepared than they were 11 years
3 ago at Hurricane Sandy. They made a lot of progress.
4 Some of it and I think this is an important concept
5 we have to recognize in terms of resilience. Some of
6 it is not about how do you keep everything dry but
7 it's actually about how do you bounce back, right?
8 And so, for example, a lot of what NYCHA has invested
9 money in is not to hold the water back entirely but
10 to make sure that nothing gets destroyed by the
11 water. One of the real lessons from Hurricane Sandy
12 was buildings that didn't have electricity, didn't
13 have elevators, etc., for weeks and months because
14 critical components have been destroyed by the
15 flooding.
16

17 It's a nuisance to have flooding as long as its
18 not sewage as Council Member Narcisse pointed out.
19 It's more of a nuisance to have water as long as it
20 goes away. The top priority that I think NYCHA has
21 wisely embraced is to make sure that when the water
22 goes away there aren't the lingering problems. That
23 is not to say they have solved everything and I don't
24 think anybody at NYCHA would say that they have
25 solved everything.

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3 I do think there is sustainability and resilience
4 team is really creative and thoughtful and on the
5 specific issue around the Borinquen Houses, I don't
6 carry the details in my head. I'd be very happy
7 personally to follow up with you and perhaps even
8 talk to NYCHA jointly.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIERREZ: Thank you. You are
10 very confident in NYCHA and yes, we will follow up.
11 Thank you so much. That's all, thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks so much Council
13 Member. Uhm and there's two final questions actually
14 coming from Council Member Sandy Nurse who had to
15 leave from Parks. Assistant Commissioner, Council
16 Member Nurse's first question is, is Parks
17 considering allowing experienced large community
18 compost organizations like bay reuse to compost on
19 appropriate parkland sites?

20 MARIT LARSON: Well, we do already have
21 composting on Park land sites at certain locations.
22 I don't know if perhaps Sarah Neilson, my colleague
23 might want to address that in more detail.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Can you please raise your
25 right hand?

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3 SARAH NEILSON: As I wrestle this chair. There
we go.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you swear or affirm to
5 tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the
6 truth today?

7 SARAH NEILSON: Thank you for the question. So,
8 the question from Council Member Nurse is about
9 whether Parks is contemplating adding additional
10 compost facilities, is that correct?

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yup, organizations
12 especially like Bay Reuse to compost on the
13 appropriate park sites.

14 SARAH NEILSON: Right, right. So, appreciate the
15 question. This is definitely something that the
16 agency has been talking about with sanitation as far
17 as you know managing their new compost need with the
18 influx with their work. So, I think it's something
19 that the agencies are you know addressing together.
20 We do know that there is such a huge demand of parks
21 facilities for all of the park uses that we already
22 have. All the ball fields, all of the children's
23 activities, all the many things that are already
24 going on in addition to you know new sports and
25 things coming along, pickle ball and all these

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1 various activities that everybody also wants to do on
2
3 Parks.

4 As we've heard in this hearing today, there's
5 also a tremendous discussion around you know what is
6 the role that Parks may or not play as far as
7 managing stormwater? And what about our tree canopy
8 and so, I think you know we will be looking at the
9 question of compost in the context of the many, many,
10 many demands on the 30,000 acres that we have and see
11 what might be feasible but also knowing that
12 sanitation has you know facilities and there's other
13 city land that might be appropriate for those
14 practices as well.

15 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you and then second
16 question was, how is Parks increasing the practical
17 application of composting a stormwater management
18 tactic on smaller neighborhood parks?

19 SARAH NEILSON: That's a terrific question. I'm
20 not sure if I have the specifics on that one and that
21 might be one where we would need to talk with our
22 gardening and maintenance folks to get like a more
23 fulsome answer for you. Although I have a feeling
24 we're probably doing that but I don't have the
25 specifics for you.

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3 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure, I'll let Council
4 Member Nurse know too and it would be helpful to have
5 more information on that as well.

6 SARAH NEILSON: Absolutely, we can do that.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks so much. That
8 concludes the questions from our panel. Alright,
9 well thank you so much to all of you. We really
10 appreciate, I know it was a long set of questions and
11 testimony but we very much appreciate it.

12 Alright, now we'll open it up to the public. I
13 know that there was a lot of testimony up till now,
14 so thank you all for your patience in waiting. What
15 we'll do is we'll call up about three members of the
16 public at a time for testimony. If you can, we'd
17 urge you to keep your testimony to two minutes and
18 we'll start the clock as soon as you start speaking.

19 So, our first three panelists are Sherrise
20 Palomino, Lynn Kelly, and Robert Camacho. Sherrise
21 Palomino, Lynn Kelly, and Robert Camacho.

22 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: And while they're getting
23 set up, I just want to make sure that some from the
24 Mayor's Office or from the Administration going to
25 stay behind? Okay, okay, so we got that covered
right? Okay, duration, for the duration okay, good.

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CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Why don't you start Adam,
good to see you.

ADAM GANSER: Uh there were three names called
and there's just one of me.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Robert Camacho, Prospect Park
Alliance, Lynn Kelly Parks and Open Space Partners
and Adam Ganser.

ADAM GANSER: That's me.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay.

ADAM GANSER: I'll just, I'll get started.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Why don't you get started.

ADAM GANSER: Well, thank you to Council Member
Gennaro and Krishnan for the opportunity to speak
today. My name is Adam Ganser, I'm the Executive
Director of New Yorkers for Parks. We lead the Play
Fair Coalition, which is over 400 parks and open
space organizations, environmental organizations
infrastructure etc., focused on our city's parks.
Uhm, our city's parks are our back yard and sources
of joy for all New Yorkers. They are also a critical
overlooked tool in New York City's fight to mitigate
the effects of climate change. New York City has
30,000 acres of park land fully 14 percent of the

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1 city. These green spaces should be seen as essential
2 infrastructure.

3
4 Our parks as you've heard today collect storm
5 water, lower temperatures, clean air and much more.
6 They are the lungs of our city and bring joy to our
7 lives but our parks can't provide these essential
8 services and environmental benefits to New Yorkers if
9 we don't maintain these green spaces.

10 I know we aren't talking about the budget but I
11 think this is related. You know we're talking about
12 5 to 15 percent cuts to the Parks Department, which
13 will have devastating results for our parks and for
14 New Yorkers and for the environment. These cuts
15 would impact park workers, most importantly
16 reductions in park workers. We're talking about
17 right off the bat with the 5 percent cuts looking at
18 400 parks employment positions being eliminated.
19 These are straight up operation safety, cleanliness
20 and accessibility positions. Again, positions that
21 take care of our trees, that clean out trash, keep
22 trash out of drainage, clean out drainage, mow the
23 lawns. Things that have a direct impact on storm
24 water, clean air etc..

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We urge the Council to fight these proposed cuts.

Three years ago, the Parks Department was cut by similar numbers, roughly \$80 million. We saw the impacts of that immediately. The Parks Department and our Parks descended into conditions that were the worst on record in 20 years by the Parks Department's own measure. Our Parks have stepped up in crisis year after year. We've seen just recently storm surges in flooding, pandemic, we had medical tents in parks and we have asylum seeker housing in our city's parks.

They're critical tools for managing climate change, mitigating heat island effect, absorbing carbon monoxide and stormwater. We cannot afford to cut our parks system, especially as our city has experienced record-breaking heat and flooding. Parks are not a luxury. They are critical infrastructure. We know the path of the Parks Department and Parks conditions for New Yorkers when the budget is cut. A lot what we're talking about today is forward thinking climate planning. Let's do the same with our parks. Instead of cutting them, let's invest in them.

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3 This Administration and nearly every one of the
4 Council Members has said that they agreed with one
5 percent for the city budget for Parks. Every New
6 Yorker deserves that, deserves safe, clean, green and
uh beautiful open space. And I'll leave it at that.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Adam.
8 Thank you so much New Yorkers for Parks.

9 CORY HASSON: Thank you. I'm Cory Hasson. I'll
10 be testifying on behalf of Lynn Kelly, who had to
11 leave early.

12 Thank you Chairs Krishnan and Gennaro and
13 Committee Members, for having this important hearing,
14 which is very timely considering the citywide
15 flooding on September 29th. I'm Lynn Kelly, and I am
16 the Executive Director of the New York Restoration
17 Project, and Co-Chair of NYC Parks and Open Space
18 Partners Coalition.

19 Today I am testifying on behalf of the NYC Parks
20 and Open Spaces, a coalition representing over 50
21 organizations that share ideas to address common
22 challenges, amplify advocacy efforts, and offer
23 technical assistance and guidance in service of an
24 equitable and resilient parks system for all New
25 Yorkers. As the Committee is aware, Mayor Adams has

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1 ordered all New York City agencies to reduce their
2 spending, citing slowed revenue growth and financial
3 strain due to the migrant crisis.
4

5 While the coalition is truly sympathetic to the
6 plight of the asylum seekers and understands the
7 logistical challenges being faced by the
8 administration, we refuse to believe that mass budget
9 cuts are the answer to a complex situation in which
10 human beings and public land are front and center.
11 In fact, if the administration follows through with
12 proposed cuts of 15 percent, they can expect to see a
13 devastating impact on our parks systems, which is
14 still recovering from cuts made during COVID-19 and
15 has fewer workers than it did before the pandemic.

16 This austerity plan only furthers societal
17 division during a time when we should be building
18 community and ensuring the availability of critical
19 services to new and current New Yorkers alike. In
20 fact, the 15 percent cuts to Parks negates the city's
21 own climate resilience priorities as laid out in
22 PlaNYC Getting Sustainability Done. Goals in this
23 plan range from creating nature-based stormwater
24 management, investing in the NYC Green Infrastructure
25

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Program, to creating over 10 acres of new open space
and achieving 30 percent tree canopy coverage.

Achieving these goals are vital not only to make
our city more sustainable and equitable, but also to
combat the impacts of climate change. The time to
implement these measures has never been more
critical. Climate change is changing our urban
environment with summer heatwaves and more frequent
instances of massive rainfall causing extensive
flooding and damage to properties, infrastructure,
and public spaces. I'm only there because I have
worn the thing but thank you for your consideration.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks so much Cory.
Thanks so much Lynn and New York Restoration Project.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: The next witnesses will be
Heather Lubov, City Parks Foundation, Alia Soomro,
New York League of Conservation Voters, and Emily
Walker, Natural Areas Conservancy.

ALIA SOOMRO: Thank you. Hi everyone, my name is
Alia Soomro and I'm the Deputy Director for New York
City Policy at the New York League of Conservation
Voters. Thank you Chairs Krishnan and Gennaro and
member of the Parks and Environmental Committees for

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1 this timely hearing. I've submitted longer written
2 comments.
3

4 As co-founders of the Play Fair for Parks
5 Coalition, we stand with New Yorkers for Parks, DC37,
6 and over 400 coalition organizations to demand a city
7 budget that gives parks the fair funding they
8 deserve. Mayor Adams, Speaker Adams, and forty-four
9 other Council Members have already committed to
10 funding one percent of the city's budget to parks.
11 NYLCV is also a member of Forest for All NYC
12 coalition, which advocates for the city to equitably
13 achieve 30 percent tree canopy by 2035.

14 Lastly, we are also a member of the Rise to
15 Resilience Coalition, calling for climate resilience.
16 I bring this up because the goals of all three
17 coalitions are connected to each other. Parks and
18 green spaces make up 14 percent of the city's land.
19 NYC Parks manages 53 percent of the total urban
20 forest canopy in the city. And roughly half of the
21 land managed by the NYC Parks is directly on the
22 water. Yet New York City Parks receive less than one
23 percent of the city's budget.

24 We cannot maintain our parks system, increase our
25 tree canopy, or improve our waterfront resiliency if

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1 we cut our parks budget. All three coalitions show
2 that over six hundred organizations in the city
3 support our parks, open space, tree canopy,
4 waterfront, environmental justice and more. We need
5 long-term funding.
6

7 This leads me to shift to the Mayor's recently
8 proposed city budget cuts. The citywide PEG cuts
9 will be nothing short of devastating for our city's
10 parks system. They would directly undermine the
11 goals set out in PlaNYC Getting Sustainability Done.
12 From the extreme heat that we saw this summer to the
13 city's air quality emergencies and the heavy rainfall
14 on the 29th, it showed the urgency of the climate
15 crisis. NYLCV recognizes that climate resiliency and
16 construction procurement, it takes a long time. We
17 understand that and we commend DEP and the rest of
18 city government working to advance the goals. But in
19 the short term, we have got to improve our city's
20 response, emergency preparedness, notification
21 especially for basement apartment dwellers in the
22 city.

23 I know I'm out of time, so I really appreciate it
24 and I have submitted longer comments that yeah, so
25 thanks a lot for having this hearing.

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1
2 EMILY WALKER: Alright, thank you. My name is
3 Emily Walker and I am the Senior Manager of External
4 Affairs at the Natural Areas Conservancy. Thank you
5 to Chairs Krishnan and Gennaro and members of the
6 Committee for allowing me to speak today.

7 In this era of climate instability, we believe
8 that our parks and in particular our natural areas
9 play a tremendous role in protecting and fostering a
10 more resilient city.

11 When it comes to our natural areas, the data is
12 clear. They contain up to a quarter of the existing
13 canopy in NYC but account for nearly 70 percent of
14 the carbon stored and 83 percent of the carbon
15 sequestered by trees across the city. They are
16 almost ten degrees cooler than our streets during
17 extreme heat events. They prevent \$4.8 million in
18 hospital bills from pollution induced illness
19 annually. They provide \$2.2 billion in recreational
20 value, \$1.1 billion in public health value and they
21 soak up as much stormwater as \$580 million worth of
22 new green stormwater infrastructure.

23 Despite these benefits, the stresses on our
24 natural areas are tremendous and without appropriate
25 public investments in their care, we stand to lose

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1 these assets entirely. We are deeply alarmed by the
2 citywide budget cuts that were announced in
3 September. The mandated five percent budget cuts now
4 in effect will have a catastrophic impact on the
5 ability of NYC Parks to implement much of its work
6 including critical care for our natural forested
7 areas and wetlands.
8

9 On Earth Day, the NAC stood proudly with Mayor
10 Adams as he committed \$2.4 million in baselined
11 funding to formalize, maintain and program over 300
12 miles of nature trails in our parks, which would
13 unlock access to over 10,000 acres of crucial
14 invaluable green space for New Yorkers. We are
15 profoundly disappointed that the funding for this
16 initiative, which had been prioritized in the 2023
17 PlaNYC Report will no longer be implemented.

18 I also want to express our concern that the
19 budget cuts mean that we are disinvesting in
20 stewardship at a time when it will be needed most.
21 One of NAC's trail maintainers is with us today in
22 City Hall and I just want to note that her work
23 exemplifies the kind of care that we should be
24 performing for NYC's land and we're taking away
25 crucial funding to help support that work.

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3 We applaud the Council's efforts to examine the
4 intersection of resiliency in our green spaces but
5 also believe that the urgency of this moment requires
6 us to speak out about further constraints on the
7 budget for Parks. Parks and natural areas benefit
8 the lives of every New Yorker from longtime residents
9 to our most recent arrivals. We understand that
10 moments of crisis demand hard choices from our
11 electeds but we also believe that these choices
12 should not come at the expense of shared resources
13 that make our city more resilient and livable and
14 that provide pathways to good, green jobs amid the
15 worsening climate crisis. We call on our elected
16 officials from every level of NYC's government to
17 work together to restore the proposed budget cuts and
18 prevent additional cuts to services that make our
19 city stronger. Thank you.

20 KATIE SWABB: I'm Katie Swabb testifying on
21 behalf of Heather Lubov from City Parks Foundation.
22 We are a nonprofit that encourages New Yorkers to use
23 and care for their neighborhood parks and open
24 spaces. Chairs Krishnan and Gennaro and members of
25 the joint Committee, thank you for having us today.

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2 THE COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 128

3 I want to begin by expressing our strong support
4 for Intro. Number 1069. In a city with four
5 Superfund sites, including one of the largest in the
6 nation, this is a common-sense initiative. City
7 Parks Foundation has firsthand experience with water
contamination issues.

8 In 2011, we designated Coney Islands Kaiser Park
9 as a Catalyst priority outreach site for community
10 engagement. And by encouraging the community to
11 conduct water testing, we revealed shocking levels of
12 pollution in Coney Island Creek, ultimately leading
13 to a lawsuit settlement and the creation of an
14 Environmental Benefits Fund.

15 We now run our Coastal Classroom education
16 program for middle schoolers in Kaiser Park, as well
17 as at Inwood Hill Park, Bushwick Inlet, Hallet's Cove
18 and Conference House Park, connecting children to
19 their waterfronts while actively engaging in water
20 testing efforts as an educational tool, working with
21 partners like the Billion Oyster Project. Our teams
22 have an eye on the water and we see that community
23 members young and old swim regularly at these sites.

24 Protecting our waterways is vital for the well-
25 being of our communities, especially for our

1 children. Additionally, we support Resolution
2 Number 608 as the effects of climate change are
3 rapidly threatening our city. Few New Yorkers can
4 deny the absolute devastation caused by the many
5 storms hitting our city. City Parks Foundation has
6 been able to respond swiftly after the storms,
7 mobilizing volunteers who can step in when the Parks
8 Department is overwhelmed with service requests.
9 After Super Storm Sandy, we mobilized 7,000
10 volunteers who planted beach grasses and other flood
11 mitigation measures but that's after the fact. It
12 doesn't address the source of the problem.

14 And although support these essential initiatives,
15 we know that they cannot succeed without proper
16 funding. Mayor Adams' order for New York City
17 agencies to reduce spending dangerously threatens our
18 park system and climate mitigation efforts.

19 We cannot afford a repeat of the pandemic-era
20 funding cuts that harmed our parks. Climate change
21 is here, and as a coastal city, flooding is a looming
22 threat. Please join us in the Play Fair Coalition
23 and urging the Administration to abandon these
24 austerity measures and to uphold the Mayor's promise
25

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to invest one percent of the city budget for parks.

Thank you for your consideration.

CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Thank you. I want to thank you for your support of Intro. 1069 and Reso. 608 and you were smiling the entire time you were giving your testimony, which we don't see all the time but we appreciate it. Smiling is nice. You know it's a nice thing.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: The next witnesses will be Katie Danny Horowitz, K Webster, and Cory Hasson, the New York Restoration Project, the Sara Roosevelt Park and North Broadway Parks Alliance.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: You may begin.

K WEBSTER: Okay, thank you. Thank you especially, you're still here. I really appreciate it. My name is K Webster. I'm from Sara Roosevelt Park, a community coalition. It's a 40-year-old volunteer organization on the lower east side in Chinatown in New York, an environmental justice area and we're a Play Fair member and my park is just a short ways from here.

I have a lot of things I wrote. I will say that green spaces are the first responders to the severe climate impacts. Impacts that we know are not going

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1 to get better. We know we must take desperate
2 mitigation measures to forestall the consequences of
3 extreme heat, extreme flooding and die off of floor
4 and flora and fauna.

5
6 Uhm, uh, I'm - we lived through the last
7 austerity budget that New York went through in the
8 80's and it wasn't good and we see that starting to
9 happen now. Trees don't live if you don't have
10 somebody taking care of them. Heat island effect is
11 real. Some people in my neighborhood do not have air
12 conditioning because the electricity isn't, you can't
13 do it in some tenements. You can't have an AC. We
14 have homeless people who will never, ever have air
15 conditioning until they're housed. Compost yards are
16 in mitigation. You can plant other plants that are
17 more resilient. There are a lot of things we can do
18 but they all require a parks budget and I got to tell
19 you that I really appreciate what your comments
20 Council Member Krishnan because this is untenable. I
21 mean, Parks are the places where all neighborhoods
22 come together. There are resiliency centers. There
23 are worker resiliency centers. If you don't pay
24 Parks employees a decent wage with a real future,
25 what do you expect them to do.

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3 So I really thank you. Sorry, whatever.

4 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Thank you. Thank you.

5 CORY HASSON: Hello again.

6 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Weren't you just here?
7 Weren't you just here?

8 CORY HASSON: It's my stunt, I have a twin
9 brother so yeah.

10 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: You couldn't change your
11 shirt or put a hat on or something?

12 CORY HASSON: Yeah, I should have got the fake
13 mustache.

14 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Alright.

15 CORY HASSON: I'm Cory Hasson and I'm the
16 Government Affairs Manager of the New York
17 Restoration Project. Thank you for the opportunity
18 to provide testimony again this afternoon Chair
19 Krishnan and Chair Gennaro.

20 NYRP is a proud member of the Play Fair
21 Coalition, a coalition of 400 organizations across
22 the city advocating for the city's park system. NYRP
23 is also a member of Forest For All NYC and a founding
24 member of Parks and Open Space partners. We are here
25 today in opposition to Administrations proposed
austerity cuts of 15 percent, which would devastate

1 the already chronically underfunded and understaffed
2 New York City Parks. Climate change is at our
3 doorstep. Only 12 days ago, NYC was ravaged by
4 flooding underscored the need for the city to invest
5 in proven solutions and green infrastructure to its
6 parks, waterfronts and open space. Parks can reduce
7 water runoff by 90 percent and filter out as much as
8 95 percent of major pollutants.
9

10 While the city continues to struggle with wetland
11 loss, flooding and erosion, NYRP's work with the
12 living shoreline at Sherman Creek Park in Northern
13 Manhattan is creating wetlands and oyster habitats,
14 which are protecting shorelines and providing natural
15 defenses against flooding for the community. NYRP's
16 investment in this critical green infrastructure also
17 allows for public waterfront access, while improving
18 the ecological health of the park, something too rare
19 in New York City, especially in underserved
20 communities.

21 These new wetlands are storing carbon and
22 removing nitrogen from waters at surprisingly high
23 rates. This means, we're not only encouraging public
24 access to the waterfront but also cleaning the air in
25 water. However, NYRP can't be in all the Parks and

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1 these proposed cuts will devastate our park system.

2 This would amount to \$75 million in reduction to an
3 already strapped agency that has fewer workers today
4 than it did before the pandemic. Parks have been
5 operating with an austerity budget for 50 years. An
6 underfunded Parks Department means less maintenance
7 workers PEP officers who keep the Parks clean and
8 safe. NYRC's forested areas soak up as much
9 stormwater as 580 million worth of new green
10 stormwater infrastructure. New York City's natural
11 areas a four to six degrees cooler than the average
12 temperature during extreme heat events. This saves
13 lives. We once again thank you for hosting this
14 important and timely hearing. Every New Yorker
15 deserves safe and equitable access to parks, open
16 space and waterfront. Thanks once again.

17
18 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: The next witnesses are Annie
20 Carforo for We Act, Rosa Chang from Gotham Park, and
21 Ciara - [LOST AUDIO 02:46:29- 02:46:50].

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yup.

23 ANNIE CARFORO: Okay, there we go. Hi, thank you
24 so much for holding this hearing. My name is Annie
25 Carforo. I'm the Climate Justice Campaign Manager

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1 representing WE ACT for Environmental Justice, a
2 member of the Play Fair Coalition.
3

4 So, founded in 1988, WE ACT is a community-based
5 organization in Harlem and has been fighting
6 environmental racism at the city, state, and federal
7 levels and due to historic disinvestment in policies
8 that enable structural racism like redlining our
9 Parks green spaces and access to the waterfront are
10 not equitably distributed across the city. Access to
11 green spaces is on average a much lower environmental
12 justice neighborhoods that are already plagued by
13 adverse health problems and high levels of pollution.
14 Low-income communities have 21 percent less park
15 space than higher income neighborhoods in New York
16 City and any attempts to equalize this discrepancy
17 falls short due to lack of agency funding.

18 The proposed austerity cuts of 5 to 15 percent
19 will further decrease the agencies ability to serve
20 New Yorkers everywhere. But those that will suffer
21 most are New Yorkers that live in environmental
22 justice communities who are disproportionately Black
23 and Latinx and who need green spaces and park space
24 the most. I have an anecdotal example for this,
25 coming out of WE ACT's work in East Harlem which is a

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1 formerly redline community that suffered years of
2 neglect, disinvestment and short-sighted planning.
3 This has allowed severe racial economic and
4 environmental disparities to proliferate. East
5 Harlem has virtually no tree canopy and a six-block
6 stretch surrounding 125th street receive no new tree
7 plantings this year and no anticipated tree planting
8 next year.
9

10 When we inquired about this with the Parks
11 Department about this stark oversight, they told us
12 that East Harlem is a hostile environment for baby
13 trees, which lowers the success rate of plantings
14 without extra maintenance which they do not have
15 funding for. When we inquired then about potential
16 green infrastructure projects leveraging the Bond
17 Act's funding for the 125th Street Corridor to help
18 cool the environment in absence of a tree canopy,
19 their first response was a concern over maintenance
20 and a lack of funding.

21 This past summer was the hottest on record and we
22 can expect to see much worse in the coming years.
23 New York City has the worst heat island effect in the
24 country. I'm going to just wrap up right now but
25 that is in neighborhoods like East Harlem, the

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1 temperatures can be even hotter than the city's
2 average. We seem to be stuck in a vicious cycle
3 where communities on the frontline of the climate
4 crisis that have suffered the most systemic
5 disinvestment are going to be hurt the most by
6 austerity politics.
7

8 If we're going to get serious about our response
9 to extreme weather events, we need to make sure the
10 department is trying to improve equity in our city
11 are fully staffed and fully equipped to adapt to our
12 changing climate. Thank you so much and I will
13 submit written comments.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much. You
15 may begin.

16 CIARA KOSIOR: Hi, my name is Ciara Kosior. I'm
17 just a member of the public from District 40.

18 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Will you just bring the mic
19 a little closer to you?

20 CIARA KOSIOR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, can you hear me
21 now? Is that better?

22 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Yup.

23 CIARA KOSIOR: Uhm, I'll start again. My name is
24 Ciara Kosior. I am a member of the public from
25 District 40. Sorry if this is a little chaotic, I'll

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1 submit better written comments. I support everything
2 that others have already said. I'm here to advocate
3 for a minimum of one percent of the city budget for
4 the Parks systems and oppose the Mayor's austerity
5 measures cutting the Parks Department Budget. I'm
6 also here because of climate resilience planning.
7 All of those bills that the numbers I don't remember
8 but the ones that James Gennaro has done, I really
9 support those. And I'm here because of the
10 disproportionate affects of environmental injustice
11 that were just spoken to.
12

13 We all know that with our common sense that parks
14 are good for New Yorkers. For one, Parks reduce
15 tragically high asthma rates especially in vulnerable
16 neighborhoods like the South Bronx. And after living
17 through Hurricane Sandy over a decade ago and seeing
18 the flooding the other week, it's clear that we need
19 urgent support and funding for our parks as
20 fortifications against climate change as you said
21 Krishnan, and uhm, and air pollution, water pollution
22 and more.

23 Instead of reiterating the words of others, who I
24 agree with, I'd also like to remind you why we need
25 funding for parks as crucial spaces to support human

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1 joy, health, and wellbeing. Parks are places us New
2 Yorkers go to for solace when we're sad. To host
3 baby showers when we're full of joy, to enjoy
4 picnics, birthdays, barbeques, graduation parties and
5 other celebrations when we have no other spaces at
6 home.
7

8 Parks are where we get married. Parks are where
9 everyone regardless of income can spend time.
10 They're where asylum seekers and our unhoused
11 neighbors go to rest. Parks are places for New
12 Yorkers to burn off steam by exercising. Our parks
13 have inspired countless paintings of mine and
14 artworks of others adding value to the city through
15 art sales and cultural wealth. Parks are where New
16 Yorkers can finally take a breather. Parks are where
17 some babies first learn to walk. Where our children
18 learn to play and interact with each other.

19 Parks are not superfluous to New York. They are
20 the lifeblood, protective skin, lungs and heart of
21 New York. They're where New Yorkers sit to expand
22 their minds, their where entrepreneurs and students
23 meet to invent and brainstorm new inventions that
24 help power our city and advance New York.
25

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1 I'm not asking just for one percent. I think
2 that many other advanced cities in this country have
3 a budget of approximately three to five percent, so I
4 think that one percent is honestly the bare minimum
5 and any advocacy that you guys can do to stop Mayor
6 Adams would be really wonderful and my last thing is
7 that our last Council and Mayor Adams funded the NYPD
8 \$10.8 billion for our annual budget and I just think
9 that there is money in our budget to fund our parks
10 system that we so desperately and direly need. Thank
11 you.
12

13 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Thank you. Thank you for
14 your heartfelt testimony. We appreciate it. Thanks
15 for your support for my bills and we ask, say hi to
16 Peggy Shepard and Lonnie Portis for me, okay.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next witness is Isabel
18 Friedman of NRDC, Andrea Adereti, Randall's Island
19 Park Alliance and Tyler Taba, Waterfront Alliance.

20 ISABEL FRIEDMAN: My name is Isabel Friedman.
21 I'm from the Natural Resources Defense Council and
22 I'm here to support Resolution 608, which urges the
23 state legislature to pass a bill creating a permanent
24 voluntary New York City floodplain buyout program and
25 the Hochul Administration to allocate significant

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1 funds from the 2022 Environmental Bond Act, so that
2 money is available promptly without delay after the
3 next storm surge. Flooding is the most common and
4 costly natural disaster in the United States. And as
5 with everything faded by climate change, it will only
6 get worse.
7

8 New York needs to continue investing in its long-
9 term resilience strategy and invest in a fully
10 fledged flood plain buyout program. By giving
11 homeowners the opportunity to relocate. Such a
12 program would reduce the risk to non-cosigned
13 properties and first responders as well as save
14 taxpayers from having to fund repeated home repairs
15 and public infrastructure projects. Post Sandy, New
16 York state spent \$276 million to buy out 721 homes in
17 Staten Island and Long Island. At the time, New
18 York's make shift flood plain buyout program faced
19 significant criticism with residents having to wait
20 up to five years before getting paid out. This delay
21 it meant that the impacts of the Hurricane lasted
22 much longer for people who depended on the money
23 coming in from the government, rather than rebuilding
24 their homes.
25

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3 To its credit, the Adams Administrations recent
4 Sustainability plan, describes that a voluntary
5 housing mobility and land acquisition program would
6 help residents access their options and make the
7 appropriate decision on their next steps. And
8 acknowledging that repeated flooding can no longer be
9 addressed with half way measures. PlaNYC took a
10 crucial step in citing a buyout plan as a long-term
11 adaptation strategy, not a reactionary measure taken
12 for short term recovery. Offering residents the
13 opportunity to move from the place they call home
14 raises understandable challenges. However, the
15 unavoidable impacts of climate change will require
16 focusing on flood plain buyouts as a key adaptation
strategy.

17 Investing in such a program now will help
18 communities determine the most effective solutions
19 before the next storm shows up at their front door.
20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Thank you very much. Say
22 hi to Eric Goldstein for me.

23 ISABEL FRIEDMAN: I miss his signs as well.

24 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: What's that?
25

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1
2 ISABEL FRIEDMAN: I miss his little handmade
3 signs as well. I'm a bad replacement.

4 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Please, next witness.

5 ANDREA ADERETI: Good afternoon Chairs Krishnan
6 and Gennaro and members of the Committee. My name is
7 Andrea Adereti, Communications Manager at Randall's
8 Island Park Alliance and I am delivering this
9 testimony today on behalf of RIPA.

10 Randall's Island Park is located in the East
11 River between East Harlem, the South Bronx and
12 Astoria Queens. RIPA is dedicated to cultivating and
13 upholding the park, offering a range of robust public
14 programs, educational opportunities to all who visit.

15 Parks are communal spaces that foster joy, unity
16 and a sense of belonging to among a diverse group of
17 populations that make up the fabric of New York City.
18 There where families gather, children play and
19 individuals find solace in nature's embrace. Yet the
20 challenges faced by our parks extend far beyond
21 underfunding. When budgets are cut, the burden often
22 falls on dedicated partners to preserve the status
23 quo. The allocation for Parks, not only falls
24 significantly short of the recommended one percent of
25 the city's budget but also introduces the imminent

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1 danger of a 15 percent reduction of Park funding,
2 placing additional strain on already limited
3 resources allocated for maintenance and programming.

4 It is imperative that Parks are not merely perceived
5 as nice to have but rather a critical component of
6 peoples lives and wellbeing. Parks are essential.

7 They are the cornerstone of our communities,
8 nurturing mental health and much needed intermissions
9 between a bustling urban landscape.
10

11 Allocating one percent of the city's budget would
12 demonstrate a commitment to the wellbeing of our
13 communities and environment. It would ensure that
14 parks have the necessary resources to flourish,
15 benefiting every New Yorker and resident and visitor
16 alike. A well-maintained and adequately funded park
17 system is an investment in the city's future. The
18 impact of these decisions reach far beyond parks
19 boundaries, not only effecting those who need these
20 spaces but those of us who support them. It is
21 organizations like RIPA who work tirelessly to make
22 these spaces accessible and vibrant for all. Thank
23 you for your consideration.

24 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Thank you.
25

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1 TYLER TABA: Okay, thank you Chair Krishnan,
2 Chair Gennaro and the Council Members for the
3 opportunity to testify. Also, thank you to the Staff
4 Navie and Greg and thank you to MOCJ for sticking
5 around, Marty. My name is Tyler Taba. I'm the
6 Senior Manager for Climate Policy at the Waterfront
7 Alliance.
8

9 We spearhead the Rise to Resilience Coalition, a
10 coalition of more than 100 organizations advocating
11 to make climate resilience an urgent policy priority
12 and also are a proud member of the Play Fair
13 Coalition. While this hearing was scheduled before
14 the extreme rainfall on September 29th, I think we're
15 again reminded why it is so important for New York
16 City to continue to invest in climate resilience and
17 the theme for my testimony today is that climate
18 risks in our region do not operate in silos, rather
19 they are exacerbated and compounded by other climate
20 risks. We're experiencing coastal flooding, inland
21 flooding, extreme heat and we should meet this moment
22 by promoting solutions that span across the range of
23 climate stressors in our region. And so this
24 oversight hearing, bringing together parks and
25 resilience does exactly that, addressing parks as a

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1 solution that spans across climate stressors across
2 our region.
3

4 We need to integrate more resilient features into
5 park designs, upgrades and retrofits. However, we
6 also have to consider the operations and maintenance
7 funding required to keep up with the existing and new
8 infrastructure. I think that's a really important
9 thing and maybe not often sexy to talk about but
10 operations and maintenance is really important.

11 In response to the city's commitments to climate
12 resilience outside of parks, Waterfront Alliance has
13 long called on the city to develop a comprehensive
14 plan for climate resilience investments and
15 priorities. We're pleased to see MOCJ kick off the
16 Climate Strong Communities program, although it's
17 only detailing six neighborhoods so far, we encourage
18 the Administration to continue to expand the reach
19 and engagement across all five boroughs. And on the
20 notion of comprehensive planning, I would be remiss
21 not to mention the Army Corps Harbor and Tributary
22 Study. Waterfront Alliance and the Rise to
23 Resilience Coalition have long been advocating for a
24 comprehensive approach from the Army Corp really
25 since the plans inception. We are at a critical

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1 inflection point with HAT's right now, where the
2 Corps tentatively selected plan falls short of
3 addressing multiple flood hazards and we have
4 submitted comments along with 45 other organizations
5 in the coalition and appreciate the level of support
6 and alignment from the city in particular. And as
7 soon as possible call for the city and the state to
8 send a letter to the Army Corp headquarters invoking
9 Section 8106 of the Water Resources Development Act
10 of 2022. And happy to talk to any members of the
11 Council, although it's just one member up here right
12 now about the Army Corp anytime, so please don't
13 hesitate to reach out for a briefing. I have a lot
14 more in my written testimony that I'm not going to
15 have time for but thank you for holding this hearing
16 and allowing us to testify.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks so much.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And the final witness is
20 Anieto Henvill from the Seton Falls Park Coalition.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: One more time, no, no one,
22 okay.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, [LOST AUDIO [03:01:04-
24 [03:01:08] On Zoom Emily Maxwell, Glenn Bolofsky,
25 Leslie Garcia, and Natasia Sidarta.

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1
2 EMILY MAXWELL: Great, I will go ahead and get
3 started. I will be very brief. It has been a long
4 hearing and one that I appreciate very much. Thank
5 you so much for holding it. My name is Emily
6 Maxwell. I am the Director of the City's Program at
7 the Nature Conservancy in New York. Thank you so
8 much for holding this joint hearing. I will make a
9 few high-level remarks and we'll submit something in
10 writing. New York City cannot be the resilient city
11 that it needs to be without a robust equitable and
12 well-maintained park system and this means at least
13 one percent of the city budget for New York City
14 Parks.

15 New York City can also not be the resilient city
16 it needs to be without all lands including public and
17 private land beyond parks, maximizing permeability
18 and vegetative cover. And rather than repeating what
19 so many of my colleagues have said today, which has
20 been terrific and I couldn't agree with more. I will
21 make a couple of key points that I think are unique.

22 One is that often times when we talk about the
23 Parks Department, we talk about it being responsible
24 for 14 percent of land in New York City with less
25 than one percent of the budget. I respectfully would

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1 say they are responsible for so much beyond that.

2 The tree cover that they care for extends to over 53
3 percent of our city and the Parks Department through
4 its oversight and management and response to street
5 tree requests literally can touch down on any block
6 in New York City. So, I think we need to understand
7 how broad their jurisdiction actually is and to fund
8 them concomitantly with that to ensure the resilience
9 of all blocks in New York City.
10

11 The second thing I'll say and I'll step outside
12 of my role as a person who advocates trees, although
13 I do. We need many types of adaptation to achieve
14 resilience and green infrastructure has been
15 mentioned several times. Our city has one million
16 buildings, only about 730 of them have green roofs
17 and yet, last year, the Green Roof Tax Abatement
18 Program that incentivizes green roofs on private
19 property was allowed to expire and we need an act of
20 the state legislature to renew it and I would
21 encourage Council -

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 EMILY MAXWELL: So, as a proud member of Play
24 Fair and Forest For All NYC, we join the advocates
25 here today to call for full funding of New York

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1 City's Parks critical infrastructure and a steady
2 investment in a robust workforce to keep the city
3 green and healthy for all. Thank you so much.

4
5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Glen Bolofsky?

6 GLEN BOLOFSKY: Good afternoon. Can you hear me?

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yes, we can.

8 GLEN BOLOFSKY: Thank you so much. I'd like to
9 thank Chairman James Gennaro and Chair Krishnan as
10 well and Central Staff and everyone at the Council
11 for their hard work on this very, very important
12 matter. I want to strongly support Intro.'s 1069 and
13 0608. We need to have a plan to buy out the people
14 who are in bad areas where the city needs to do
15 remediation. That's a commonsense bill and so is the
16 other one. Simply to let us know about things that
17 are in our water that are not healthy for us.

18 So, we want to strongly support those bills. I
19 want to compliment the Council's leadership here
20 today as well again as Chairman Gennaro and Krishnan
21 simply because these things are of the moment and are
22 in dire need. So, thank you very, very much for
23 helping to take care of our great city.

24 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Thank you Glen. As always,
25 it's always good to see you.

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3 GLEN BOLOFSKY: Thank you. Thank you sir. Same
here.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Leslie Garcia, Natural Area
5 Conservancy.

6 LESLIE GARCIA: Hi, hello. So, my name is Leslie
7 Garcia and I'm just speaking on behalf of the public
8 and the personal effect on the budget cuts and the
9 funding of parks.

10 So, as a young professional passionate about
11 parks and resiliency through natural areas
12 restoration, my time working with Natural Areas
13 Conservancy alongside with New York City parks, I
14 faced a hurdle due to the budget cuts impacting jobs
15 availability in my desired field. Despite this, I
16 proactively sought out internships and volunteer
17 opportunities to gain experience and networking
18 within the industry.

19 I engaged in courses to enhance my skills and
20 knowledge, while also connecting with mentors who
21 provided guidance and advice. I remained persistent,
22 believing in the value of my passion and dedication,
23 with eventually securing a fulfilling role that will
24 align with my aspirations in parks and natural areas
25 restoration. The impacts of Trail funding being cut

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1 has been profoundly felt by the aspiring young
2 professionals like myself, who are eager to work in
3 natural areas management.
4

5 This reduction has created a notable setback,
6 stripping away a vital pipeline to full-time
7 employment opportunities. The Trails funding not
8 only supported the conservation and management of
9 natural areas but also provided a crucial platform
10 for young talent to gain hands-on experience,
11 mentorship, and skill development. Thank you, that's
12 it.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And the final witness is
14 Natasia Sidarta.

15 NATASIA SIDARTA: Hi, good afternoon. I'm
16 Natasia Sidarta. I am the Community Stewardship and
17 Operations Director at Gowanus Canal Conservancy.
18 I'll keep my testimony brief. We are a proud member
19 of the Forest for All Coalition and the Play Fair
20 Coalition and I'm here to echo many of my colleagues
21 and that we would like to express support for the
22 tree canopy as essential green infrastructure. And
23 although this hearing is not about the budget but
24 that we need this budget to prioritize the equitable
25

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1 management of our shared public space and it's
2 maintenance.
3

4 I'll talk a bit about Gowanus specifically. Many
5 of our colleagues have talked about the record-
6 breaking heat in addition to the massive flooding
7 which severely effected Gowanus in so many ways
8 including damaging local businesses and homes, multi
9 public transit, overflowing our combined sewer
10 system. And so, this underscores the need for our
11 city to continue investing in parks and open space,
12 improving green infrastructure solutions including
13 rain gardens and the street trees.

14 In Gowanus, we take care of over 670 young trees
15 throughout the past decade and we work with a network
16 of volunteers who water, weed, prune, and remove
17 litter and debris but they will always need
18 maintenance that cannot be done by those volunteers.
19 Many of those you already know, including pruning,
20 sidewalk repair and species control. And we
21 appreciate the city's efforts to leverage federal and
22 state funding for resilience and infrastructure but
23 we continue to need the Council to advocate for like
24 Protect for parks and ensure that trees in our parks
25

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1
2 are able to provide these essential social and
3 ecological infrastructure. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Thank you. Thank you all
5 very much for coming to our hearing today. These are
6 the diehards who are staying. We appreciate that.
7 Yeah, we have gift bags for you as you leave for
8 being the last ones. I'd like to thank my Co-Chair
9 Council Member and Chairman Krishnan and all the
10 staff that worked on the hearing and all of you that
11 really make it into a hearing because without you,
12 we're not hearing anything.

13 So, appreciate that and great working with Shekar
14 and uhm, with that said, this hearing is adjourned.
15 I'll give my Co-Chair the final words.

16 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Just to say thank you so
17 much Chair Gennaro. Thank you to everyone who stayed
18 for all your advocacy every day. This is an issue
19 that is only getting more urgent, as we've heard
20 today and I think we speak for both Chair Gennaro,
21 myself and our whole Council that we are very proud
22 to work with you all in this and to keep fighting
23 together to protect our city from climate change and
24 I appreciate the testimony today and look forward to
25 our continued work together.

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3 So, thank you all so much. The hearing is now
closed. Do you want to gavel out?

4 CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Gaveling out. Thank you.

5 [GAVEL]

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Alright, we're now closed.
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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 OCTOBER 22, 2023