

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL
INTERGROUP RELATIONS

----- X

March 11, 2019
Start: 10:00 a.m.
Recess: 5:00 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm, 14th
Fl.

B E F O R E: James Van Bramer- Committee on
Cultural Affairs, Libraries,
International Intergroup Relations
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Joseph C. Borelli
Laurie A. Cumbo
Karen Koslowitz
Francisco P. Moya

A P P E A R A N C E S

Dennis Walcott
President and CEO of Queens Library

Tony Marx
President and CEO of The New York Public Library

Linda E. Johnson
President and CEO of Brooklyn Public Library

Tom Finkelpearl
Commissioner for Cultural Affairs

Victoria Kowanetz
Children's Librarian at Seaside Community Library
Queens

Danielle Shapiro
Brooklyn Public Library

Kokila Frank
Brooklyn Public Library with Sunset Park Branch

LaMeane Isaac
Branch Manager at Macon Library - Brooklyn

Sarita Daftary
Just Leadership USA

John Calvelli
Executive Vice President at Wildlife Conservation
Society

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Cathy Hung

Executive Director, Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning

Arthur Aviles

BADD, Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance

Demetries Morrow

Chocolate Factory

Lucy Sexton

Cultural Advocacy Group

Mark Rossier

Director of Grants a New York Foundation for Arts

Rocky Bucano

Universal Hip Hop Museum

Inez Aslan

New York Historical Society

Lisa Alpert

Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn

Francine Garber-Cohen

Regina Opera Company

Katie Cox

Exploring the Metropolis

Matthew Zadrozny

Save NYPL

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Michael White
Citizens Defending Libraries

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

5

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [Gavel] Good morning everyone and welcome to this very important Preliminary Budget hearing of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. We are first going to hear from the three presidents and CEO's of our public libraries and then we're going to hear from the Commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs and then we're going to hear public testimony and I know a few people have signed up for libraries and I also know that as we start with libraries our friends from the cultural world are in the house and well represented. And apparently pretty rowdy this morning and I'm sure you will appreciate and love our libraries as we talk about libraries and then we'll hear from the Commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs and then take public testimony.

So, to all of the folks who are here for libraries, know that I am with you and stand with you, as does the City Council. We have I think, a really good track record. For me over the last 21 years, but for the last ten as the Chair of this Committee and I know working with Speaker Johnson, we're going to continue to fight for our public

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

6

libraries and I said outside at the rally. The work that you all do, the work that our public libraries do in serving our public is so important all the time. In good times and bad that we should always be talking about what more we can do for libraries and not coming from a place of scarcity or weakness, right? We are a strong and mighty community, a strong and mighty force for good. Just about anything good that happens in this city couldn't happen without libraries and without library workers and we've gotten to a good place on public libraries in this city, but we can do even better and I want to frame the discussion there and make sure that we're all working towards that goal.

So, we are anxious to hear from our three presidents and CEO's and then we will turn to the wonderful world of culture and the arts in New York City and then come back to some of the folks who are library workers who wish to testify as well as many of the folks from the cultural community who have signed up to testify as well. Today is a busy day of lots of hearings, so members will be coming in and out of the hearings, but I didn't want to keep the President and CEO's waiting any longer.

1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
2 INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

7

3 So, without further ado and in the order that
4 they so choose, we'll hear from Dennis Walcott, the
5 President and CEO of the Queens Library, Linda
6 Johnson, the President and CEO of the Brooklyn Public
7 Library and Tony Marx the President and CEO of the
8 New York Public Library. So, however you all choose
9 to begin your testimony.

10 DENNIS WALCOTT: Thank you Chair, and good
11 morning. I am Dennis Walcott, President and CEO of
12 the Queens Public Library and it's a pleasure to be
13 here and thank you Chair Van Bramer, Speaker Johnson
14 and the members of this esteemed committee for the
15 opportunity to speak with you about our budget
16 priorities for the next fiscal year.

17 So, before I start with my written testimony, I
18 just want to modify one thing that you said Chair.
19 You said, you have a very good track record, you have
20 an excellent track record. It's better than very
21 good and what you and the members of the Committee
22 and the Speaker and others have done has been
23 continuous support for our libraries and I just want
24 it on the public record that its been an excellent
25 track record and we really, really appreciate
everything that you do for us because you have made

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

8

us the thriving institutions that serve the public in
New York City.

And as you well know, public libraries play a
critical role in our society. We are the last, open
democratic institution that seeks to transform
people's lives by providing free access to knowledge
and information, and by creating opportunities for
growth and empowerment to all. Libraries are for
everyone, regardless of a person's background or
identity. The public depends on us for outstanding
programs and services, broadband access and
trustworthy information to improve the quality of
their lives. It would be impossible for us to meet
their needs without your steadfast support and
leadership. Therefore, it is with deep gratitude
that I thank you on behalf of every person who works
at and is served by the Queens, Brooklyn, and New
York Public Libraries.

We collectively appear before the Committee today
to discuss our Fiscal Year 2020 Operating and Capital
needs. As you know, New York City's libraries are
asking for \$35 million in operating funding for
Fiscal Year 2020 and \$900 million in Capital Funding
under the City's ten-year plan.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

9

I am happy to report that Fiscal Year 2018 was another busy and productive year for us at Queens Library. We welcomed over 11.4 million customers, a 2 percent increase from the previous fiscal year and saw substantial increases in visitors in several of our locations. For example, in our North Hills community library had an 18 percent increase in visitors, the Forest Hills community library had a 13 percent increase, Peninsula had a 9 percent increase and the Flushing community library, and this is always a tough stat for me to believe, had an increase of 7 percent, and why I say that, Flushing is just so busy no matter what time of the day you go there, it's just full of people. So, for Flushing to have a 7 percent increase, is a tremendous testimony to what's happening at all of our libraries.

The Library's books, DVDs, magazines and other materials circulated 12.4 million times at Queens. Our dedicated and created staff have worked tirelessly to find ways to serve the public in innovative ways are within and beyond the walls of our libraries.

Last summer, we launched our book cycle, a matter of fact Chair, you were on the book cycle with your

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

10

helmet and we have pictures, so anytime you need that, we have it for you. Outfitted with a book display and free Wi-Fi service within a 100-foot range, allowing our librarians to ride to various locations and provide the public with our services.

Our librarians from eight branches form the Queens library robotics league to bring robotic teams to our system and the competition is already kicking off and it is heavy, and it is cut throat and their talking about all their robotics teams and how they're going to beat the other one. Moreover, our outreach team had story times in local hospitals, homeless shelters and laundry mat to bring the joy of reading and discovery to families who otherwise would not be able to benefit from our programs.

Over three million people used our computers or accessed our Wi-Fi network and in December of 2018, we made it easier for our customers to access our Wi-Fi by removing the prerequisite of entering a library card number. Now all of our customers, whether they have a library card or not, can instantly connect to our Wi-Fi at any of our 65 locations. We have also tripled our internet

bandwidth, thereby providing even faster service to
the public.

Queens library offered 87,500 programs during
Fiscal Year 2018 and customer attendance of more than
1.5 million surpassed the all time high we set for
our system just last year by 8 percent.

For too many Queens residents, the digital divide
presents barriers to education, job opportunities,
and responsibilities of daily living. Approximately
30 percent of the borough does not have broadband
access or a computer at home. In certain
communities, that number is much higher.

In addition to presenting everyday obstacles,
this divide can create a significant problem
affecting the amount of funding the city receives
from the federal government and our representation in
Congress. With the Census Bureau's emphasis on
having people complete the 2020 census online, the
Library will undoubtedly play a critical role in
ensuring an accurate count and let us be clear, the
city will not be able to get a complete count of its
residence without the assistance of all of our
libraries working in tandem with the city's and
others.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

12

Therefore, we look forward to working with board side the City Hall in the weeks and months ahead to secure resources for outreach, training and equipment necessary to count every New Yorker and succeed in this vital mission.

Universal Six-Day library service exists because of this Council and you Mr. Chair and Mayor de Blasio. On behalf of every New Yorker, especially the people who visited Queens Library on a Saturday in Fiscal Year 2018 a total of 1.6 million times, we say thank you. As has been stated previously, the funding that we received several years ago was just enough to make six-day service a reality. Deep down in our collective hearts, we know that we are not providing the full level of service to our customers need and deserve and another quick aside, so this past Saturday, a couple days ago, I was in the library to do some work and then I walked in and I saw a long line of people and I was trying to figure out, what's the long line of people there for and they were there to get their taxes done and they were there for free tax service. And then I went upstairs, and I heard some noise on the second floor at the Queens Central Library and then I peeked my

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

13

1 head in and there was room full of students, adult
2 students, who were getting ESOL classes and that's
3 what we do. We provide a variety of services, now
4 six, well, some of us seven days a week as well.
5

6 When the city empowers libraries, it empowers
7 individuals, families and communities. Libraries are
8 the heart of creating a fairer City, so we stand
9 ready and able to make that vision a reality and for
10 us to do this, we respectfully request \$35 million in
11 expense funding in the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2020
12 Executive Budget, of which \$9.7 million would go to
13 the Queens Library. And as you know, there's a
14 formula we follow.

15 This figure includes \$8 million that the Speaker,
16 Speaker Johnson and the City Council provided to the
17 libraries this fiscal year. We cannot afford to lose
18 that money as well.

19 It is of the utmost importance that at minimum
20 the Council restore the investment for Fiscal Year
21 2020. However, it would truly make a difference if
22 the Council were able to enhance that figure. This
23 funding is critical to us as it supported vital
24 library operations such as staffing, programming,
25 collections and critical maintenance projects. When

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

14

you consider the fact that the Administration has looked to cut funding to libraries, reauthorizing and potentially increasing this funding is of great importance.

While we appreciate last year's funding, it does not keep pace with the rising costs related to healthcare, insurance, and inflation. Further, the \$2 million that the Administration allocated to DDC for libraries to address capitally ineligible projects was, in actuality, for libraries and culturals, and we respect our culturals and their needs as well and could not be used by any of the systems to address our vast critical maintenance needs.

Without increased funding, we will need to make serious decisions about our operations that will negatively affect our customers. Consequences may include: Reduction of operating hours; inability to have fully staff community libraries; decrease in e-materials; outdated information; less programming, inability to address critical maintenance issues, resulting in costlier capital projects. Let me reiterate them. That libraries create a fairer City and as we continue to connect with the new

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

15

populations it provides us more opportunities to
transform peoples lives and in order to properly
serve the people of this great city, we need clean,
safe, modern and inspiring spaces.

Queens Library has more than one million square
feet of library space, and all of it is heavily used.
Furthermore, over the next decade, we will add an
additional 50,000 square feet to our system's
footprint. Maintaining our physical spaces is no
small feat. We have identified a capital need of
nearly \$270 million over the next 10 years to
modernize all of our facilities and bring them into a
state of good repair. For Fiscal Year 2020, the
Library has projected at least a \$47 million need to
fund new projects and address shortfalls for several
pending renovation and expansion projects.

Thank you for the opportunity for allowing me to
speak today and I now turn it over to the esteemed
doctor from the New York Public Library, Dr. Tony
Marx, doctor?

TONY MARX: Thank you, Mr. President, Mr.
Chancellor, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the
opportunity.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

16

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, I just want to interrupt a thundering applause for Dr. Tony Marx to say that we're actually not allowed to applaud, believe it or not in the Council Chambers, but you can do this, every time you're happy or you agree with something, so, lets practice, do you all believe that libraries should get more money in this years budget? Right, do you all believe that Culture and the Arts should get more money on the Budget? Do you all believe that Tony Marx is a wonderful man?

It was good, that's all I'm going to say.

TONY MARX: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, good morning and thank you again, as we're always happy to repeat because its true, so grateful to your leadership, to the City Council's leadership and of course, to the Mayor and the City for everything that they've done and that you have done steadfastly.

I could sit here and speak about the moment in our democracy inspired by this room and we all are very conscious of how essential libraries are for protecting our democracy. For helping our citizens, inform them, skill them, prepare them, even help them vote, help them be counted. Those issues are in the forefront of all of our thinking at this point, but

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

17

today I'm going to focus a little more on the ground to say, you have made it possible for us to do so much more. The City has requested us to do so much more and the evidence of our ability to do that is very clear on the ground. So, lets move from rhetoric to where we live. Some examples, in recent years we've begun to use libraries as community conversation spaces, save spaces, for discussions about civics, mental health, opioid epidemic, accessibility inclusion between police and neighborhoods essential and really cannot happen in any place other than the safe space of the library. In English language instruction, again, on the requests of the City's Mayor and City Council. We've doubled our seats in more than 500 percent increased our enrollments since 2012 in English language. We've helped more than 5,000 people through our citizenship classes to achieve citizenship. We've seen a massive increase in our computer skills training, because it is essential for work in the 21st Century. We're now at the New York public close to 120,000 people attending those programs. We have close to \$3 million computer sessions, \$3.3 million wireless sessions in addition to our Wi-Fi lending

for those people who can't get to the library and
can't afford broadband at home.

We've seen thousands of people benefit from that
program. We are so proud to have been able to
partner with the City in everything that you have
asked for and everything that the Mayor has asked
for, whether its early literacy, preparing kids to do
better at school once they leave the library, or not
leave the library but move into school, but we get
them typically first. We've seen 137 percent
increase in our Early Literacy programs in the last
two years. We're at close to 800,000 visits to those
at this point; the City First Readers program, again
with leadership from the City Council, we're at
110,000 early literacy kits. One Book, One New York,
we've been a key partner in that. We've heard the
City that we need to reach out to those folks who
have been incarcerated or formerly incarcerated,
we've created two physical facilities at Rikers and
the Manhattan Detention Center and are working with
video visitations in eight locations.

On the homeless again, at the request of the
City, because this is all so important to all of us,
programs that now reach over 6,000 homeless people.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

19

IDNYC the great effort led by the City Council, the New York Public Library has been the place where 20 percent, the largest single percentage of ID's have been gotten. We are registering voters as Dennis said, we're working on the Census. We cannot do all of this if we don't get increased funding simply because our costs have increased. We want to do everything in partnership with you and we're proud of what we have done but it is simply unsustainable without additional support. The same is true on the Capital side, we are so grateful to finally be in the 10-year Capital plan where the public libraries of New York should have been for a century and now you're starting to see the fruits of that. Whether it's bigger branches in Roosevelt Island, Van Cortlandt, or in East Harlem, Macomb's where we are creating a new library that is five times the size of what was there for decades. Construction is about to begin in Charleston, Staten Island for a new branch. All of these have real costs and that's not even talking about the Mid-Manhattan's transformation into the Niarchos Foundation Library, our biggest branch. Again, additional services, additional staff, additional hours, all essentially needed but has to

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

20

be paid for. The Woodstock Branch renovated in 2016,
all of these require additional help so that we can
do what libraries need to do.

We have an aging footprint, we have talked about
that and we have to not only fully renovate where we
can, but also do partial renovations where we can.
Some of those are significant, the Francis Martin
Library in the Bronx needs \$34 million of renovation
in a high needs neighborhood where 73 percent of
families speak a language other than English at home.
That branch has made amazing strides in the last
year. Our adult programing just at Francis Martin is
up by 600 percent. 600 percent and that's because
this community, all of our communities need so much
more. It's why we're going to fully renovate five of
our Carnegie's top to bottom with a tranche from the
10-Year Capital Plan. There is so much more that we
are doing and so much more that we need to do.

Let me just be clear, Mr. Chairman. The
libraries, everything that we do represents the
values of this City and is often a response to the
requests from the citizens and the elected officials.
All we stand for is what New York stands for. We are
so proud to be in the forefront of gathering across

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

21

1 differences at a time when that is not happening in
2 this country. Respecting and welcoming immigrants in
3 every way at a time when that is not happening in
4 this country, providing skills for jobs and
5 opportunities at a time when that seems stalled in
6 this country. Providing connectivity to all the
7 worlds wisdom, whether it's in books or on devices at
8 a moment when that is essential and so many of us
9 take it for granted. Serving kids who need a leg up,
10 serving the incarcerated who need to be welcomed back
11 into our communities. These are all the priorities
12 of this City. They are the priorities now more than
13 ever. The libraries have proved that we are at the
14 forefront. We are right there in every neighborhood
15 doing all of this for the City and we're super proud
16 that we can do that, but we can't do it if we don't
17 get additional investments, let alone if we see a
18 decrease in those investments.

19
20 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 LINDA JOHNSON: Thank you, Chairman Van Bramer.
22 I thought my colleagues were particularly eloquent
23 this morning and because it can't be said enough,
24 thank you, thank you. Not just for this year but for
25 all your hard work on behalf of our institutions.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

22

Thank you also to Speaker Johnson, to Majority Leader Cumbo, Finance Chair Dromm, and our Brooklyn delegation, and the entire City Council for supporting New York City's libraries.

Over the last four years, the city had invested in the growth of libraries, understanding the value we bring to our communities for free, open and democratic spaces for all. That investment has empowered us to deliver reliable core services six-days a week; create responsive new programing; and upgrade our spaces.

Today, I urge you to take the next step in fulfilling that commitment, allocating \$35 million in operating funding for all three systems. This will ensure our growing programs remain strong and our new and expanded spaces are staffed with library workers, program-rich and filled with materials our patrons deserve.

Unfortunately, rather than supporting this much needed growth, the Administration has just asked the three library systems to take a collective reduction of \$85 million, Brooklyn's share is \$2.5 million. It threatens our ability to deliver on the promise of best in class library service. There is no doubt

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

23

that collections, staffing, and hours of service will
suffer is we are forced to bear this out.

I also ask that you advocated once again to
include the libraries in the City's Ten-Year-Capital
plan. One time in our history, four years ago,
libraries were included, helping address long
unanswered needs in some of our aging facilities, but
2016 should not be the anomaly. We ask the Council
to champion our inclusion once again. Recurring
capital funding in the ten-year plan is essential,
without it, we simply cannot efficiently manage our
physical plant, which as you know, is almost entirely
comprised of city-owned buildings. The three library
systems also request \$15 million from the Council in
capital funds this Fiscal Year, \$5 million for each
system to cover critical maintenance.

Of the \$35 million for consideration, Brooklyn
Public Library's share is \$9.7 million. This funding
will support increased collections, programming, and
staff, particularly aimed at our new and expanded
spaces, as well as funds for maintenance updates in
our branches that are not capitally eligible.

The size of Brooklyn Public Libraries collection
is far what it should be for a system serving 2.6

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

24

million people. In years past when faced budget cuts where possible, Brooklyn Public Library chose to keep staff in place and hours of library service open at the expense of the collection. The toll of keeping the collection budget constant for too long, is that many of our materials are aging and outdated. Last year, your allocation allowed us to bring the collection budget up to \$10 million for the first time. As part of this year's request, we aim to reach a collection budget of \$12 million, in order to serve our new and expanded branches. While this would raise to \$5 our per capita book budget here in Kings County New York, it would still be far less than the \$10 per capita in King County, Washington.

Demand for our services has soared. Last year, we hosted 8 million visits to our branches and our materials were checked out more than 13 million times. Library card signups are up 13 percent and beyond our walls, we offered library service and collections at 200 sites throughout the borough, including schools, senior centers, homeless shelters and correctional facilities.

Though patrons continually stream through our doors to check out books, our purpose has expanded

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

25

beyond making the printed word available to all. In 2018, we offered an astounding 70,000 programs that attracted over one million attendees, an increase of over 8 percent. In every branch across Brooklyn, it is standing room only at weekly Story-time sessions offered in 12 languages as often as possible, and our New Americans Corners are helping smooth the path to citizenship. Patrons rely on English as a second language classes where attendance is up 14 percent, and senior citizens are learning basic computer skills from technology resource specialists in every branch. More than 37,000 programs enriched our children, from literacy programs for those five and under, to young adult STEM programming like our Lego Robotics League.

We've also introduced exciting and innovative programs including the first musical instrument lending collection in NYC and in partnership with Bard College, we now offer the first ever accredited college degree program in a public library. Expanding our work with vulnerable populations, Brooklyn Public Library's youth service librarians filled nearly 500 backpacks with books and materials in multiple languages and delivered them to children

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

26

waiting in a Brooklyn Courthouse after separation from their families at the U.S. Southern border. Our librarians also offer Hospital Storytelling, providing children free books and story time programs while they await treatment. Just this month, Emma's Torch opened shop in our Library Café, offering 12 week paid culinary apprenticeships to refugees who learn skills and improve their English literacy while working in the café at Central.

The growth of library service is not confined to our programs, staff, and collection, it also includes reworking physical locations that were bursting at the seams, inefficiently laid out and saddled with enormous capital needs. Brooklyn Heights, Sunset Park and Greenpoint Libraries, are being entirely rebuilt. With your support, these bigger, new, and inspiring libraries will soon be open to meet the demands of their growing communities.

We are also delighted to open Brooklyn Public Library's first new branches in 36 years, beginning with a new library on Adams Street, near the Brooklyn waterfront, as well as a new library in the downtown cultural district. Brower Park Library is moving to a new location in the Brooklyn Children's Museum,

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

27

affording us a new space in a city-owned building two blocks away from the current leased location. These new branches all require adequate staffing, expanded programming, and additional materials. Staffing needs to include a range of library workers from librarians and public service managers to increased security and custodial staff.

Tapping into the over 1,000 government and community partners we worked with in the past year, Brooklyn Public Library will host more library services off site than ever before, as many of our branches undergo crucial capital improvements. There is nothing that we hate more than service disruption in a community. Increased funding will help us better address this challenge. With additional outreach librarians building local partnerships, and drivers for our bookmobile fleet, and at least one new tech mobile in the coming year, we will strive to offer programs in every community experiencing a branch closure.

And finally, many of our branches are vulnerable to unplanned closures resulting from maintenance issues and equipment failures. Every year, we spend precious operating dollars maintaining old boilers,

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

28

replacing dilapidated furniture, and funding temporary heating and cooling fixes while we wait for long overdue capital projects to be completed. We are funding urgent projects that are either not capitally eligible or are impractical, costly and time consuming to address through the city's design and construction process.

Every summer we are forced to shut down branches when air conditioning systems fail, and every winter, when boilers break. In the last Fiscal Year, we lost 629 hours to unplanned closures at 35 of our 59 branches. Just last month, Borough Park, Macon and Washington Irving Libraries, all closed unexpectedly because of heating failures. Keeping our libraries open is our highest priority, but short-term fixes drain our already overtaxed expense dollars, and ultimately take funds away from other worthy library operations.

As I stated at the outset, the three library systems are requesting a total of \$15 million in capital funding this year, to address critical maintenance, \$5 million for each system from the Council in addition to a capital allocation from the Administration.

Our current level of capital funding only allows us to tackle the most urgent problem. In Brooklyn, the vast majority of our allocation is swallowed up filling shortfalls to keep projects afloat. Valuable time and scarce resources are spent responding to emergencies, rather than strategically approaching building renovations.

Relying on small yearly capital allocations makes it challenging for us to manage capital plans efficiently. Upgrading our buildings piecemeal, system by system, increased costs, elongates timelines, and disrupts communities. Because libraries do not have recurring discretionary funding in the ten-year-plan, we cannot draw from future fiscal years to cover current year shortfalls, leading to delays and further cost escalations.

As I explained earlier, four years ago, the Administration included libraries in the ten-year plan for the first time. Brooklyn's funds were earmarked for five full branch overhauls, allowing us to approach building renovations comprehensively. These five projects are underway, and the funding was put to good use, but it did not address the need for discretionary capital funding for the rest of the 1.1

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

30

million square feet of physical space we are charged
with maintaining.

While each library system needs \$5 million in
this budget year from the Council alone, it is
equally, if not more important for libraries to be
funded in the city's ten-year capital plan. We
implore you to urge the Administration to include us
once again, and definitively categorize library
buildings as City infrastructure. Without a
recurring source of yearly funding, we are not able
to perform necessary preventative maintenance, ensure
projects continue to move forward with they incur a
shortfall, or manage our physical plant, city owned
buildings, in the most efficient way possible.

It has never been more important for civic
institutions to support their communities. In dark
times, when truth and access to information is of
critical importance, libraries provide the light.
When neighbors want to gather to discuss the day's
headlines, libraries provide the safe space. When
civic engagement, voter registration, participatory
budgeting, IDNYC and free legal help for immigrants
are top city priorities, libraries have taken the
lead.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

31

With resources and representation at stake in the upcoming 2020 Census, the city will rely on libraries, as it should, to help ensure every resident is counted.

Now is the time to help us achieve our mission, not the time to cut our operating budget. Now is the time to shore up your investment in libraries and allow us to realize our potential. Millions of New Yorkers are relying on you to ensure that libraries, our most accessible, democratic institutions remain strong for all who come through our doors and that, as promised, they open wide for everyone. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much and Linda, while we all know your name very well, my Council says that when you began your testimony, you did not state it for the record. So, would you state your name and title for the record.

LINDA JOHNSON: For the record, I am Linda Johnson, President and CEO of Brooklyn Public Library.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Just the words of your name illicit a massive response from the crowd. First, I want to recognize member of the Committee, my colleagues who have joined us, Joe Borelli from

the great borough of Staten Island and from the
amazing Bureau of Brooklyn, Ms. Laurie Cumbo and they
both have questions, so I'll ask a few and then I'll
hand it over to my colleagues and I know we have some
others joining us.

First, thank you for recognizing the work that
this Council has done and obviously I am really proud
to have been the Chair of this Committee now in my
tenth year and I want you to know and I meant to say
this earlier, I live and breath libraries. So, much
so that the book I am reading right now is the
library book by Susan Orlean, which I'm sure a lot of
folks in this room are familiar with and for my
colleagues who may not be reading the book right now,
it's fascinating story about the terrible fire at the
Central Library in Los Angeles and then using that as
a way to actually talk about the history of - oh,
look at that, Joe Borelli on point in this Committee.
But luckily, their testimony was scintillating Joe,
so you didn't have to break out Cleopatra, but this
is a well-read Committee, let me just say.

But I love reading the book, it reminds me just
how important the creation of public libraries is and
that incredible wacky story in those early days in

the late 1800's and the early 1900's as the Los Angeles Public Library was coming to be. But a lot of people believed in this institution and knew how important it would be to create it and then we are the caretakers and we are the stewards now and we just have to get to a place where no matter where any particular municipality is in its budgetary ebbs and flows, we have got to get to a place where we understand the importance of public libraries and that we have got to shift to the conversation once and for all from a place of cuts and reductions to a place of what can we do to make sure libraries are open as often as possible, staffed with as many great library workers as possible to help the people who so very much need them. And that is what I want for our City and it's so very, very important that we get there.

We've done great work including libraries in the 10-year Capital Plan for the first time ever. It was a big victory and the Council was really significant in fighting for that inclusion and we've got to do that again. The baselining that we have experienced obviously, we feel very good about having fought for that. The level of funding that we saw last year is

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

34

1 obviously something we fought for and we need to not
2 only maintain the gains but expand what we are able
3 to do for our libraries.
4

5 So, I want to ask all three systems to talk a
6 little bit about what you were able to do with the
7 funding you received last year, both programmatically
8 and staffing wise. We were able to do some really
9 good things, both the Council and the Administration
10 working together, and libraries had a very good year
11 and if you can, with the staff talk about union, non-
12 union. So, programmatic, what you did with the
13 funding and then staffing, union, non-union, all of
14 that.

15 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, I'll start, and I mean with
16 the money that we received, we've been able to
17 increase our programming and as Tony indicated I
18 think, in video visitation we've seen an increase in
19 the number of visits and the services that have been
20 received. In addition to that, we've been able to
21 deal with increasing our collection budget as well as
22 staffing patterns and when I finish the general part,
23 I'll go to the specific chart on talking about the
24 breakdown on the staffing as well and I think as
25 Linda indicated with the expansion of our space, it

requires the expansion as well and so, we've been able to grow staff to meet those space demands and that's always a unique challenge for us and as a result of that, we have also been able to for Queens and I imagine the other systems as well, on the capital side, been able to really devote a lot of the capital money for needed work. And even though that we've talked about the capitally ineligible dollars that put pressure on our expense budget through the capital side of it, we've been able to take a look at new roofing, masonry, air conditioning, and really upgrading the systems. And we've been very lucky as you all know, Chair in Queens both through the City Council and through the Bureau President as well as the Exec side, of having a lot of capital money flow in but I think the additional money from the Council has allowed us to really target it in a very important way.

We always face I think, the strain of the capital needs, not necessarily being met based on the original projection so, you will always as you well know, increase in capital needs. So, the increased capital budget has allowed us to plug some of those gaps that have existed. So, you'll come in with an

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

36

estimate at X but then X turns to Y and Z, and so,
the additional capital money has helped us to do
that.

With staffing, staff breakdown is that from
07/01/2018 in Queens to 02/01/2019, we have 976
Union, 144 non-Union, hourly rate of 751 for a total
of 1,871 staff and when you take a look at that,
we've been able to really maintain I think a very
healthy representation of staffing throughout the
Queens system and hires from 07/01/2018 to
02/01/2019, we hired 27 Union, 21 non-Union, for a
total of 48. From 07/01/2017 to 06/30/2018, we hired
64 Union, 22 non-Union, and then going back earlier
of 61 Union and 31 for 92 totals. So, we've been
increasing our staffing as well as far as Union
representation and so, we've been trying to be very
targeted with the funding but the final thing in
response to your question, at least from the Queens
side, is that this money has allowed us and I think
Linda referred to it in her testimony to plug gaps as
well and so, where we see those gaps, we've been able
to really be very diligent with the gaps because
those gaps and capitally ineligible gaps have been

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

37

really eroding our expense budget and we have to be
very conscious of that.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, I just want to
follow up. First, let me also recognize we've been
joined by Francisco Moya from Queens, also a member
of the Committee.

So, Dennis, just roughly speaking because I think
this is important. There was a significant amount of
funding that was allocated last year to libraries, we
always want it to be more, and not all of that was
baselined, and so, it's important for folks to
realize that folks that may have been hired in the
last year and we want to make sure that we're in a
position not only maintain all that we have but even
bring even more people on because you're going to
need even more library workers to keep up with the
demand and the increase in both libraries and the
sheer space that you got to cover.

So, the number of new folks that were hired in
the last several months, do you have a ball park
figure of what the number was and if we were not able
to restore that funding that you got last year at the
same level, would there be anyone in jeopardy?

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

38

DENNIS WALCOTT: So, at least from the Queens perspective, I mean as you know, as CEO's we have a fiduciary responsibility to make sure that we balance our budget and so, we have to do our projections and we're doing our modeling right now in Queens and we're taking a look at various scenarios as far as if funding is not coming in or God forbid we lose funding, what that would entail, and so, we've taken a look at some of the alleys and the impact on alleys, some of the non-Union as well and so, we have couple of scenarios in place depending on what happens with the future budget. We've cut our OTPS like crazy and trying to make sure we balance our books and so, our OTPS is at a bare minimum if it exists at all. So, that way we can protect the staffing to the best of our ability but at the same time, we have a fiduciary responsibility based on the funding cycle.

So, we're looking at a variety of scenarios but we continue to hire but it's not as robust right now because again, we have to be extremely responsible as far as not just hiring to hire and then not having money there in the future to support that, so we're being very conscious about that.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

39

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And we should be talking about doing more for our libraries and making sure that we're getting the robust funding we need.

So, from July 1, 2018 to today, is there a ball park figure? That's what I'm trying to get.

DENNIS WALCOTT: Yeah, that's the 27 figure that I mentioned in Queens and that's Union 21. So, 07/01/2018 to 02/01/2019, that's the total of 48.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: 48, okay, great. Who is next?

TONY MARX: Mr. Chairman, so in terms of the funds, the unallocated expense funding from the City Council directly three and a half million dollars last year, \$1.7 was used to fund important wage increases associated with the minimum wage that is such an essential standard for the City to meet. As well as collective bargaining salary increases for non-city funded Union employees, retroactive payments, \$300,000 for overtime expenses in the branches, one million dollars for building repairs, maintenance and equipment, a half a million dollars in particular for additional books. After all, OTPS includes books which are also an essential ingredient. I can say that the size of our union

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

40

workforce went from FY 16 1450 to about 1502 FY 18.

I can get a further breakdown to the one year but that shows the two-year trend. Again, we know that we need more library colleagues because we have more branches, more square foot, more programs, more hours, more days.

On the capital side, we have currently \$565 million of active capital construction projects that includes the single largest project in terms of dollars in the history of the New York Public Library, the transformation of the mid-Manhattan into the Niarchos Foundation Library and I can read out for you all the branches in all the neighborhoods, but I do want to point out that the New York Public Library privately is currently investing \$192 million in capital improvements through pass throughs. So, we have in addition to the great resources that the City has provide, we're putting our own resources to work to partner with those. And I have just since July until now, our hires have been 62 Union, 51 non-union and of course there always is unfortunately attrition that cuts against that.

LINDA JOHNSON: Thank you. For Brooklyn Public Library, of course, the biggest expansion began with

2016 and the move to six-day service. The library is currently at 999, let's say 1,000 employees. 833 of which are Union employees and in the last Fiscal Year, we hired ten people, all of them Union but keeping our overall staff at a constant.

We have really put to hard work the capital money that was allocated in the ten-year plan by addressing the five complete branch overhauls that were intended for its use. We have at three of the five projects, are DDC managed. Eastern Parkway, New Utrecht and Brownsville, each of those projects is in design and there's already been significant community engagement and outreach sessions with the public and stakeholders which will be incorporated that feedback, into the design. There will be also a new **Lotsee**, completely new library and **conarcy**, and both of those will be done as pass throughs and there are consultants who are beginning community engagement on those projects.

Really the most significant thing that has been done with the funding over the past four years is to increase programming and the individual programs that are offered, not only at the Central Library but throughout the system and that I think, has been

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

42

whats driving up attendance in those branches as well
as participation in programs in general. For which
we've become well known and also, done I think, a
better job at reaching into harder corners of the
community to reach. So, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. And before I
turn to my colleagues, all of whom have questions,
one quick question for Dennis Walcott. You and I
have toured recently several times the Hunters Point
Library.

DENNIS WALCOTT: Yes sir.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And wanted to get on the
record the latest update and when we might expect to
see that library open?

DENNIS WALCOTT: So, it's interesting in that
last night, I did something that I normally don't do.
I was out last night, and I was here in Manhattan and
in driving down the FDR I took a look or driving back
off, the FDR, I took a look over at the Hunters Point
Library and saw the lights on and it really looks
lovely from over here. So, based on projections, and
again, as we know its projections, by the end of
March, we may have the TCO and then we'll see what
happens from there. We're still projecting summer

time, but again, as I think I've been very clear, summer goes through September 24 and so, it's not necessarily a July, August so we have to be very flexible.

But we haven't really talked about this before, we have posted the jobs on our site right now and so, we have as you have met I think, the new manager that's going to identify with hiring up at this particular point, so people have been identified or being interviewed for the job, so we're moving along that line.

Books are in place and once we get full occupancy to do what we need to do, and they will all still be working some parallel tracks with DDC. I think when we were there last and maybe not, remind me; we saw the projection of the safety glass. So, that's being tested out, I'm not sure if it's being permanently installed yet, but I know its been tested out as far as the various models of concern. And so, just for the Committee, so you're aware, part of the push back that we had with DDC was while some of the railing and the safety glass reached the building departments requirement of four, four and a half feet, we were very uncomfortable with a number of the areas and we

were able then to have a redesign where it will be up to seven feet for the safety, especially as you go vertical onto the top floors.

So, we're excited to see the progress but again, it's still a very laborious process as far as the various people in there and then having multiple contractors who have invested interest for their own unique need to not necessarily the collective hole and so, we, in our team, have been managing that and the expectations as well.

So, it's being gradually outfitted. I think when we were there the shelving is being put as well as so, we have things in storage. So, we're ready to rock and roll once we get the full clearance to get in there and then as I think we said publicly, once we permanently get in there then we say, give us normally three months to outfit a library for something like Hunters Point, though we're saying give us five to six months and so, if we get it at the time frame they said this time, then we'll be in there a little more diligently.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, you and I are there every couple of weeks.

DENNIS WALCOTT: We are.

1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND 45
2 INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

3 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And touring it together
4 so it is starting to take shape.

5 DENNIS WALCOTT: Looking like a library.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Exciting. Let me go to
7 my colleagues, Joe Borelli first.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Yeah, just a quick
9 question, you said you were renovating five Carnegie
10 libraries top to bottom. Which one are those?

11 TONY MARX: I'm sorry for the New York Public?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Yes, sir.

13 TONY MARX: Hold on one second, I will get you
14 the list. 125th Street Fort Washington; Hunt's
15 Point; Melrose; and Port Richmond. We also have
16 major projects going in Staten Island, in your
17 district and Charleston; Great Kills; Huguenot;
18 Richmond Town; and Tottenville.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Okay, thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Laurie Cumbo?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Thank you, Council Member
22 Van Bramer. I always know that it is budget time
23 when I see the bright orange shirts staring out, it's
24 official. It's one of the official signs of budget
25 season and I always tell so many other groups, you
need a color and a T-shirt, it is very powerful.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

46

DENNIS WALCOTT: We reuse them every year.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: You reuse them, right?

DENNIS WALCOTT: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I wanted to talk just in general for all three groups in terms of MWBE's. So, we have a very rigorous campaign here to increase MWBE participation throughout the city and given the magnitude of capital resources, and I know it's never enough but given the magnitude of resources that have been contributed, can you speak to your MWBE recruitment process? Where it is? How successful it is? Where it needs improvement as it always does and where you're at with your MWBE's.

LINDA JOHNSON: So, of course, through the projects that we're doing with DDC, the library doesn't control the subs that are hired for particular projects but with the projects that are passed throughs where we go out with requests for proposals, of course, one of the critical requirements that we list in the documents is the inclusion of MWBE's for our projects.

DENNIS WALCOTT: So, at Queens, and same with Linda, what Linda just said, but I mean with a lot of our procurement and our board took a very serious

look and we had a very rigorous board meeting probably around a year ago now, where we are meeting our threshold levels and we're very proud of that. I don't have the specific figures here, but I'll be glad to make sure that we get it to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Do you know what the threshold numbers are?

DENNIS WALCOTT: Above 25 percent, we're above 25 percent on awarded contracts at Queens, and that's with our goods and services and other types of service we provide.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: So, you're at your threshold, or your saying you're over your threshold at this point?

DENNIS WALCOTT: **Sung** [SP?] is general council, Sung?

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I think if he's going to expand anymore on that, he should sit on with you and identify himself, because he is sort of testifying on the record.

DENNIS WALCOTT: Okay, and as my general council, he knows that. So, I mean we can give you more detailed information and I'll be glad to do that or if you desire, we can have Sung come up and he can go

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

48

chapter and verse as far as specifically what we're
doing in that area. So, I'll abide by your wishes.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Well, I'm having a little
bit of difficulty understanding the prospective in
terms of goals that are set. Where you're at with
those particular goals. I understand that through
the subs, you don't have the control but do you have
the ability to know where you are with the subs as
far as their participation and where they are with
that, because this is an incredible opportunity as
far as the amount of capital resources that are
allocated. It's a huge opportunity for New York City
but it would also be a huge economic missed
opportunity if MWBE's weren't a huge part of the
capital plan in order to realize the larger goals and
so, I just wanted to see where you are with that as
well.

LINDA JOHNSON: In terms of Brooklyn, I didn't
give you a specific number and as you can see,
there's a flurry of activity going on here while we
all try and get you the number that you're looking
for. In the case of Brooklyn, with projects that we
do control, we're in line with the city's goal of 30
percent.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

49

1
2 TONY MARX: So, obviously we all take this
3 incredibly seriously. We understand why this is a
4 crucial investment, particularly as we're investing
5 in the branches which we have to keep doing. When we
6 work with DDC, obviously the DDC and we follow the
7 City's guidelines and we're proud to do so, because
8 we're capable of doing some pass through operations,
9 which require serious private funds which are
10 stretching us this point, particularly given that
11 Mid-Manhattan is our biggest such, but at Mid-
12 Manhattan which is a pass through therefore, not a
13 DDC project, which also means the citizens of New
14 York get twice as much done at half the amount of
15 time when we manage that ourselves but in that
16 instance, we are 29 or getting close to the 30
17 percent target for MWBE for the Mid-Manhattan project
18 which is our biggest single privately managed
19 project. So, we're staying with the targets of the
20 city and if possible, we'd like to exceed them.

21 DENNIS WALCOTT: And with Queens, we have very
22 few if any pass through at this point as Tony
23 indicated.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I'm sorry, you have very
25 through?

3 DENNIS WALCOTT: Pass through projects on the
4 capital side and so all of our projects for the most
5 part is through DDC itself.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: So, through the pass-
7 through project, all three systems feel that you're
8 meeting those thresholds on the pass through but when
9 it goes through DDC, you're feeling that the numbers
10 are demonstrating that you're not meeting those
11 goals?

12 LINDA JOHNSON: No, I didn't say that. It's just
13 that it's not within our control.

14 DENNIS WALCOTT: It's not at our prevue.

15 LINDA JOHNSON: So, DDC is also striving to meet
16 the thresholds that the city is aiming to meet, and I
17 assume we are in good shape on those projects as
18 well.

19 DENNIS WALCOTT: And I apologize if I was
20 confusing, I was suggesting that we love working with
21 DDC but we also have frustrations because it takes
22 twice as long, costs twice as much, which is why we
23 allocate when we can and we are stretching ourselves,
24 private money to pass through, so that we can get
25 things done for the citizens faster, cheaper, and in
those pass throughs which I think the New York public

is probably in a different place, mostly because of the research library and the private funding associated with the research library but also with Niarchos library, that in those privately managed library managed projects, we are sticking to and seek to exceed the city's goals of 29 or 30 percent in these huge projects.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Okay, well, it's certainly something that we want to continue to look at because again, this would be a missed opportunity if we didn't continue to push forward for those goals and even to exceed them on so many levels.

I wanted to dive in a little bit more specifically of course, into the Brooklyn branch which I spend a lot of time at. So, the Brooklyn Public Library's flagship central library is undergoing a large multi-phase renovation. Phase 1 which is currently underway includes infrastructure upgrades and new element such as a popular library and civic commons. When is Phase 1 expected to be completed?

LINDA JOHNSON: So, Phase 1, as you mentioned is underway and we are committed to keeping the library open throughout the construction of the entire

project. Each phase is scheduled for two years and so, we are just a few months into the first phase.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Do you have an update on 300 Ashland? It's the multi-million dollars, eight-hundred-pound gorilla.

LINDA JOHNSON: It is the question of the moment, I do not. Perhaps the Commissioner Finkelppearl can answer that question.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: He is in the building, I can see him now, so we will have that opportunity very shortly.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Oh, that's wonderful. I am very happy to hear that. So, in the five-year capital plan about \$155 million has been dedicated to comprehensive branch overall for five branch libraries. Which of the branches and what is the extent of renovation that the branches are receiving?

LINDA JOHNSON: Assuming you're talking to me. Give me one second.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I'm a little Brooklyn centric.

LINDA JOHNSON: We love that. So, the five branches that are being overhauled with the money from the 10-year capital plan as I read, are New

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

53

Lots; New Utrecht; Canarsie; Brownsville; and Eastern
Parkway.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Eastern Parkway on
Schenectady Avenue?

LINDA JOHNSON: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Alright.

LINDA JOHNSON: So, three of those projects are
DDC managed, that's Eastern Parkway, New Utrecht and
Brownsville and each of those is already in the
design phase and have already undergone extensive
community outreach to hear from our stakeholders what
their looking for in a newer largely overhauled
library. There are two projects that are being done
as pass throughs. They are New Lots and Canarsie and
we retained a consultant to begin community outreach
on those projects as well and we'll issue an RFP for
architect shortly.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: And just one final
question. The Walt Whitman Library, where is that in
the process of completion or beginning?

LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, actually I'm hearing that
DDC is just beginning that.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: With a completion date of
when?

1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND 54
2 INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

3 LINDA JOHNSON: Three years completion or 2022.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Wow.

5 LINDA JOHNSON: And you know the size of that
6 library?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: In my estimation, it's not
8 a huge project but I don't want to discount the size
9 of a library by its physical appearance.

10 LINDA JOHNSON: Extraordinary work is done there
11 as in all of the branches but it's a small space.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Alright, I understand loud
13 and clear. Thank you very much, thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And I understand why the
15 timeline would be less than ideal in many respects
16 for my colleague.

17 The Commissioner of the Department of Cultural
18 Affairs is in the wings, but we want to make sure
19 that Council Member Moya gets a chance to ask his
20 questions as well.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Thank you Chairman. Thank
22 you all of you for being here today. Dennis, it's
23 always a pleasure to see you and thank you for all
24 the great work that you're doing for Queens.

25 DENNIS WALCOTT: Same to you sir. My best to your
mother.

1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND 55
2 INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

3 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Yeah, and I was just going
4 to say, my mother says hello.

5 DENNIS WALCOTT: From last year, I remember that
6 very well.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Please wave because she's
8 watching. Tradition is tradition.

9 DENNIS WALCOTT: Yes, I know.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: So, now I'm just not going
11 to ask you anything. Thank you, Dennis, thank you,
12 you just made my day. But just going into a couple
13 of issues that are critical in high immigrant
14 districts like mine. Adult literacy is a very big
15 issue for us and programs like the ones that have
16 been performing very well at the libraries,
17 particularly in Corona and in Jackson Heights, the
18 adult literacy programs are just essential. What
19 would the library system be able to do with the
20 expansion of funding for this type of work?

21 DENNIS WALCOTT: Oh, that's key for us and I
22 imagine all of us as far as the adult literacy as I
23 indicated maybe just before you arrived. Saturday I
24 was at Central and I heard just a number of voices
25 and different languages speaking and it was around
adult literacy and whether it's in the evening hours,

1 during the day, on weekends, we provide adult
2 literacy programs and continue to expand those
3 services. So, with additional money, we were able to
4 not just expand it but really target where there is
5 an underserved community and making sure we're having
6 those needed services there for the adult literacy
7 because as you know, in our borough and throughout
8 the city, the need is so great. So, we would
9 continue to take a look at where we could target the
10 money and expand and maintain those services.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: And it's just so critical
13 because you know, a lot of the parents, their
14 children are the translators for them in school and
15 the fact that we're also expanding the Wi-Fi programs
16 inside the libraries making it faster speeds for
17 people to go and kind of learn. It is just essential
18 that we are able to fund programs like that and sort
19 of expanding that to help our communities all over
20 the city, but in particular high immigrant
21 communities as well.

22 And then also, what funding and maybe you touched
23 upon this before I got here. What funding has been
24 allocated for capital purchases of land and
25 construction in Queens?

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

57

DENNIS WALCOTT: Well, in particular in your area as you know, we're working on a number of projects and so, for Corona, we have Corona fully funded right now. So, we'll begin the work soon as far as working with DDC to do the expansion and renovation of the Corona Library. So, we've set aside money there. As you also know in your area, we're about to open or reopen East Elmhurst and so, we're looking at that. We have projects that are set aside through the funding in a variety of areas dealing with the capital needs of the borough Queens and so, whether it's boiler replacements, AC throughout the system, we are taking a look at how we apply those capital dollars. I think one of our more complex projects that will be coming up and we're taking a look at the designs on this right now, is adding a second elevator at Flushing. Flushing only has one elevator, so how their able to expand with an additional elevator without closing Flushing is going to be the most unique challenge we have. And so, our people are taking a look at that and so, the allocation of dollars for Flushing. At Glendale, we have a temporary site in Glendale, so we have not allocated for land, but we're using expense dollars

quite frankly for the additional space for Glendale while that's under renovation. So, we have a lot of capital projects going on at this particular point.

In Jackson Heights as you know, we have funded the expansion and renovation of Jackson Heights and so, we're really throughout the entire borough taking a look at how we used the capital dollars to enhance our systems and to grow our space in a creative way.

COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Great. So, big fan of having our libraries be open seven days a week and I think it's just important you know, you said, when the city empowers libraries, we're empowering people and the way we do that is by having full access and seven day a week. Has that been something that has been sort of considered in budgeting this year? What that would be? Because we would love to fight to see that we can get seven days going in our library systems here.

LINDA JOHNSON: We would love that to, but no, that's not something that we have in our sites this coming year, just because of the large expense that it presents. It's over time and it's more expensive to be open on Sunday's then elsewhere. But it's a

great goal and we always have it in our sites. We have to sort of look for it at the right opportunity.

TONY MARX: Just to reiterate, we all have sites open seven days a week, again with thanks and all of our sites are open six days a week, none of that was true and we have more sites. So, all of that has been amazing but let's just be, again, I just want to be direct here. We have added more programs, more footprint, more hours, more days, more branches, everything to meet the needs of New York and we haven't for instance, gotten the increases that will enable us to sustain that. So, we are literally, we are eager to actually do more. More programs, more services for our communities which are so vital. But at this point, if we don't get an increase in funding, we can't sustain what you have enabled us to do thus far because as you know, the costs continue to rise. Money only goes so far and if we have a reduction in funding, then obviously, any of that will produce actual reductions in services, crucial services to New Yorkers who are depending on us more than ever.

And on the capital side, just to go to the previous conversation, if we work with DDC and it

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

60

costs us twice as much money to get things done, the
citizens of New York are not getting what they
deserve.

COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Correct.

TONY MARX: Right? We have projects that are
vastly beyond there budget, DDC managed projects.
That is a huge challenge for us and it's why for
instance in the 10-year Capital plan which we have to
continue to be in. I mean, there is no way for us to
be rational, efficient and effective on the capital
front without the 10-year commitment and in our first
tranche we took the five Carnegies and we took those
to EDC to manage instead of DDC. Again, we are
looking for creative ways to get you all more bang
for the citizens and the city's buck.

DENNIS WALCOTT: If I may, just one quick second
with your permission. So, my Chief Operating Officer
comes to me on a regular basis correctly so saying I
need money for this capital need or that capital
need, but its not necessarily the capital needs that
are funded through our budget, it's capital
ineligible needs that we have to use expense money
for and whether it's a door or whether it's some
other type of capital expense that ineligible for the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

61

use of capital dollars it comes out of our bottom
line of expenses and as our facilities age and all
the normal. To the glass that will be at Hunters
point, it's going to boggle my mind as far as
maintaining Hunters Point as we move forward and
those are the challenges that all of us face at our
respective sites as far as again, meeting our bottom
line. Being responsible from a finance point of view
but the same time, not allowing our facilities to go
by the way side as far as looking shabby or having
things stay broken for a period of time and that's
the challenge. So, seven days a week, while
laudable, we have a tough time right now meeting the
requirements for six days a week and I think people,
not here in this room but people will always say,
well, libraries will always be there. Libraries will
always have their doors open. Libraries will always
provide services but not really think through of what
those services and those doors staying open actually
cost us and that's our responsibility and our
collective responsibility, so while I would love to
do that, I think our challenge and what we're saying
to you today is that not just maintain, but increase
because the increase will allow us to do whats

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

62

required to provide this great city with great
libraries.

COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: And I appreciate that. I
think for us, it's for us to go and fight to get you
that funding. It's to make sure that you don't have
to come here each year and just beg to keep these
libraries open. It is probably one of the most
fundamental and most critical things that we have to
do is to really enrich our libraries because this is
what helps our children, our seniors and everyone
that walks in those doors. Some of this is we have
high communities of color and immigrant communities
that are suffering the most and we really need to go
and have real conversations with the Administration
about the priorities that we set as a body, that the
libraries are at the top of that list to make sure
that you are getting everything that you can because
you have provided some great services to the
community and to the City of New York.

So, I just want to thank you for the great work
that you do and that we will continue to fight this
year for your guys in the budget. Thank you, thank
you Chair.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

63

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Here here, so let me just associate myself with Council Member's Moya call and I want to get a picture of everyone's hands up. So, if you think that libraries should really be a seven days service, now is the time to do this, right? Alright, look for that on my Instagram page later.

So, first of all, let me just thank our three public library systems. Obviously there is no set of institutions that do what you do in and for the people of the City of New York and we have got to continue to pursue what we know is true universal access, not just information but the hope that comes with the information and you all do that better than just about anybody. And so, the Council has been at the forefront of this fight and we will continue to be at the forefront of this fight with you and with all of these amazing library workers and I hope the cultural folks are taking notes and now are just big on libraries, big on libraries, but your time is coming because we're going to say good bye to these folks. We're going to take a two minute very quick break, and then Commissioner Finkelpearl is waiting

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

64

in the wings and we'll start the Cultural Affairs
portion of this Budget hearing. Thank you.

Alright, Commissioner, would you like to take the
appointed seat? We are going to begin shortly.

Those rowdy librarians, rowdy library workers. So,
just a reminder after the Commissioner testifies and
responds to questions, then we're going to go to the
public testimony and I know a lot of folks have been
waiting but because libraries went first, we're going
to take a panel on libraries first and then Culture
and we'll see how many panels we have if we need to
rotate. I think there are more folks to testify on
the Cultural end but if we will endeavor to have
everyone be able to testify as quickly and as
efficiently as possible.

And the Sergeant at Arms will let us know when
we're ready to go. We're good to go, alright.
Welcome Commissioner and welcome to everyone for the
Cultural Affairs portion of the Preliminary Budget
hearing of the Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
International Intergroup Relations Committee, at
which I am the Chair. We have members in and out,
but I want to recognize Council Member Francisco Moya
from Queens and I know others are coming and going.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

65

So, before Commissioner Finkelpearl is able to
testify, he needs to be sworn in by our Council.

CLERK: If you can please raise your right hand.
Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and
nothing but the truth in your testimony before this
Committee today?

TOM FINKELPEARL: Yes, I do.

CLERK: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And let me just say
before Tom Finkelpearl testifies that we've been able
to do some good things with respect to the Department
of Cultural Affairs Budget over the last several
years. Some things, I'm really proud of. On the
City Council side, we've been able to do remarkable
things with our Council cultural initiatives but
working together we have seen some increases. We
want more, we need more and the cultural community
deserves more, which is one of the reasons why I'm
saddened to see the gap that the Department of
Cultural Affairs received be as significant as it is
and I won't speak for the Commissioner but I believe
that we all in this room know that the City of New
York is better when the cultural community is funded
in the ways that we know they need to be funded,

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

66

because of what that means to the people of the City
of New York and our very values.

So, I want to also recognize that we're joined by
Council Member Joe Borelli from Staten Island as
well.

So, with that Commissioner we'll hear your
testimony and questions and then we will go to public
testimony.

TOM FINKELPEARL: Thank you very much. I
actually just wanted to say one thing before I begin
my testimony. A great staff member of ours Tim Thar
has retired. I think everybody knows that but it's
interesting because a rumor went around that I am
retiring because of the Tim and Tom connection. We
kind of look the same. I would like to dispel that
rumor before I begin my testimony. I am here, I do
not plan to leave.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I did not expect you to
begin your testimony with the proclamation that you
are not retiring.

TOM FINKELPEARL: I just thought I'd clear it up
because I've heard it several times now.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you for
clarifying.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

67

TOM FINKELPEARL: So, I will now begin, okay.

Good afternoon, Chair Van Bramer and members of the Committee. I am Cultural Affairs Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl, here today to testify in regards to the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2020 preliminary budget proposal for the Department of Cultural Affairs, which is DCLA. I am joined today by a number of my staff from the agency.

First, I will review the numbers from this year's preliminary budget proposal. The agency's proposed baseline expense budget for Fiscal Year 2020 is \$151.5 million. This includes: 28.6 million for the Cultural Development Fund; \$109.5 million for the Cultural Institution Group; \$1.25 million for the Energy Coalition members; \$7.1 million for agency operations and other expenses; and \$5 million that was baselined at adoption for the 2019 budget.

It is important to note that this is the preliminary budget proposal. These figures do not include any initiatives or other one-time additions typically added at our budget adoption.

Our 2019 baseline budget, as presented at this hearing last year was \$142.1 million or \$9.4 million less than this year's.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

68

After incorporating one-time additions, the one-time additions that I just mentioned, DCLA's Fiscal Year 2019 budget came to \$200.3 million, DCLA's largest budget ever. This investment in the cultural life of our communities is thanks in part to our strong partnership with the City Council, led by the Speaker and Chair Van Bramer. It also reflects a continuing commitment to the goals of CreateNYC. I'll discuss some of these in more detail later in my testimony.

I'd also like to highlight that the agency continues to be an incredibly efficient funder; operating expenses represent just 3.4 percent of our overall budget. This means 96.6 percent of our funds now flow directly to the cultural organizations and neighborhoods that make our city a cultural powerhouse.

Our Process for distributing next year's funding is already underway. Applications for the Fiscal Year 2020 Cultural Development Fund were due last month. The panel review process starts soon and will run through June. As always, we appreciate the Council's support and involvement in this important process. There is a seat at the table for the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

69

Council on every panel and we value the collaborative
input.

Turning to capital, DCLA's five-year capital
budget currently allocates \$1.15 billion to ongoing
projects at more than 200 cultural groups. These
projects are essential to cultural organizations and
audiences in all five boroughs. They ensure access
to the best and most efficient facilities and
equipment. This varied portfolio encompasses
everything from purchasing AV equipment to
construction of entirely new facilities. But across
the portfolio, energy efficiency has become a major
priority in recent years, especially following the
release of CreateNYC, which called for more green
capital investment. Highlights include: The
Brooklyn Botanic Garden has nearly completed the
multi-phase redevelopment of the South Garden, which
features numerous water conservation improvements
through the installation of a comprehensive system to
capture rainfall, filter and recirculate captured
water, reduce the use of fresh water, and minimize
storm water overflow while also creating a new
botanical water garden display. The Staten Island
Children's Museum received funding to upgrade their

temperature control system. This will provide more efficient management of heating and cooling for collections and patrons alike, with the added bonus of being on-demand and automated, reducing its operation from 24 hours per day to an estimated 9 or 10. We're working in the Bronx Museum to support the renovation of their South Atrium, which will include installation of more energy efficient windows and an upgraded HVAC system. The dance Theater of Harlem will also be upgrading their outdated HVAC system, as well as their boiler and fire safety systems to make them more efficient and effective.

The Queens Botanical Garden's new education center will be a 15,000 square foot facility including teaching kitchen and teaching greenhouse, further supporting the organization's mission of celebrating plants and cultures through learning and real-world applications of environmental stewardship.

As you can see in these environmentally oriented projects, CreateNYC continues to influence DCLA's priorities, programs, and budget this year. In addition, new grants programs and initiatives are pushing forward cultural plan priorities on multiple fronts. For instance, another major priority for the

plan is forging stronger connections between city resources and cultural sector, with we've pursued in a number of ways.

Following the Mayor's Grant for Cultural Impacts successful pilot year in 2018, this year we expanded it, providing \$500,000 for ten partnerships between City agencies and cultural organizations to fund programs benefiting underserved New Yorkers. They include five renewed partnerships from the pilot and five new partnerships. For example, PEN America will work with the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment to host free writing workshops for immigrant communities in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. And the Weeksville Heritage Center will partner with NYC Commission on Human Rights to trace the history of Bedford-Stuyvesant and through its Black-owned restaurants.

DCLA launched Public Artists and Residence or PAIR in 2015 to embed artists in City agencies, where they work alongside staff and constituents. The artists use their creative practices to help address some of our thorniest civic problems. Since then we've placed artists and collectives in nine PAIR residencies. And we are continuing the program with

four new city agencies on board to host artists this year, the Department of the Aging, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Department of Records and Information Services, and the Mayor's Office of Sustainability.

Working with the Department of Buildings and the Mayor's Office, we created City Canvas last fall to allow public art installations on the city's 300 miles of sidewalk sheds and construction fences. The omnipresent structures are essential to public safety, but they can be uninspiring to look at. After an open call seeking interested cultural organizations, we've selected Studio Museum and ArtBridge, who will commission artists to beautify these neighborhoods throughout the city. We hope to celebrate the first installations under this program in this spring.

We've also made deliberate efforts to connect our constituent cultural organizations with City resources and to bring them together at events and program.

In September, we convened a group of mid-sized organizations to learn how to secure contracts for arts in education services in New York City's public

schools. Our partners at the Department of Education's Office of Arts and Special Projects presented detailed information on their contracting process. This met our goal of expanding access for our constituents as the DOE seeks to diversify the organizations offering services to schools and students.

In October, we partnered with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to co-host What Can We Do? Immigration Summit for Cultural Organizations for nearly 200 representatives from NYC arts nonprofits. The event served as a forum to discuss how the cultural sector, along with City government, can work in solidarity with our immigrant neighbors, many of whom are at the core of our arts and cultural communities.

In February, we worked with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities to host Disability and Inclusion in the Cultural Workforce, an event for over 150 representing over 90 cultural organizations. Attendees heard personal perspectives of people with disabilities working in the arts. They learned about local, state, and regional resources offering support

in developing more inclusive recruiting, hiring, and retention practices.

Two Citywide projects have become powerful tools for helping reduce economic barriers to participation in NYC's cultural life.

IDNYC, the City's municipal identification card, is now in its fifth year. Among the card's wide range of benefits, it continues to provide cardholders with free one-year memberships at 40 cultural partners, now including Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art.

2018 saw the launch of Culture Pass, a new initiative administered by NYC's three library systems. Library card holders can use their cards to acquire free passes to over 45 cultural institutions in all five boroughs. DCLA was able to facilitate announcements about Culture Pass on LinkNYC kiosks across the city and provide funding to support related programming at library branches in traditionally underserved neighborhoods.

CreateNYC also outlined our long-term commitment to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in New York City's cultural landscape. To this end, we have

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

75

worked to build an emphasis on diversity into the
agency's funding at every level.

Fiscal Year 2019 was the first year that Cultural
Development Fund, the CDF applications, included
questions about each applicant's efforts to hire
diverse staff and reach diverse audiences.

To further increase accessibility for all
qualified organizations to extensive programmatic
funding that DCLA offers, Fiscal Year 2020 CDF
applicants benefited from enhanced support to their
application submission process. This is in addition
to services already offered such as the twelve
applications seminars held annually at locations
across the city. These enhancements this year
included: An online version of the Fiscal Year 2020
CDF application seminar presentation, with closed
captioning; Drop-off tables at cultural locations in
the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and Upper
Manhattan, from 10am to 2pm, on the application date
of February 11th and technical assistance for CDF
applications including extended hours of the CDF help
desk. And finally, in person drop off at DCLA
offices which stayed open until 11:59pm on the
evening of the deadline.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

76

The members of the Cultural Institution Group are being required to adopt full diversity plans that set benchmarks and increase accountability. These will be completed later this spring. We have worked closely with them to figure out how to produce plans that translate into concrete improvement towards cultivating a more inclusive cultural sector.

In August, we announce the grantees of the new CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund. The fund provides programmatic support for organizations deepening their commitment to people with disabilities as artists, cultural workers, and audiences. Twenty-two organizations in a variety of disciplines received grants to up to \$35,000. Projects ranged from creation of new work featuring disabled artists, to re-examining collections through the lens of disability aesthetics, to training people with disabilities for employment in creative careers.

The CUNY Cultural Corps continues to go strong. In 2018-2019 school year, over 130 students from 16 CUNY colleges hold paid internships with 63 cultural institutions throughout the city. This means that at the end of just three years, a tremendously diverse group of 340 students will have received excellent

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

77

professional development and experience in the
working world. They have provided over 62,000 work
hours to the cultural sector.

The CreateNYC Leadership Accelerator, a newer
partnership with CUNY, attempts to address the lack
of diversity in high-level positions at cultural
organizations. The program, which is free of charge
to the participants, provides professional
development and leadership skills training to diverse
groups of mid-career cultural professionals. After
successful pilot cohort in 2018, the program has just
kicked off its second year, serving 52 participants
this year.

We're particularly pleased to be able to
substantially increase funding for local arts
councils. In partnership with the City Council, we
provided five borough councils with nearly \$3
million, which in turn went to individual artists and
community-based arts organizations. Artists are at
the heart and soul of New York City, and this
investment helps ensure that they have the support
they need to stay living and working in our
communities.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

78

In January 2018, Mayor de Blasio released the final report from the Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments, and Markers. As you know, I co-chaired this commission alongside Darren Walker, President of the Ford Foundation. The commission was charged with developing recommendations on how the City could address monuments and markers on City property that are the subject of significant public debate.

In the last year, a significant amount of progress has been made in enacting the Commission's recommendations.

In response to the Monuments Commission's report, the Public Design Commission is now undertaking a one-year project to review the City's art collection. The first phase of the project will result in a public online database of outdoor monuments and memorials and is planned for completion in August 2019.

Nearly a year ago, the City removed the controversial statue of Dr. J. Marion Sims from its pedestal in Central Park and committed to working with residents to commission new artwork for the site. As part of the process, the Committee to

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

79

Empower Voices for Healing and Equity, made up of local stakeholders in East Harlem, Department of Cultural Affairs and the Department of Health, was formed to spearhead the Beyond Sims initiative. Its goal is to ensure ongoing community engagement throughout the artist selection and design process. Using the Percent for Art process, five finalists have been selected and will submit proposals in the coming weeks.

Last summer, First Lady Chirlane McCray and former Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen, and women.nyc launched She Built NYC, an initiative to honor remarkable women who contributed to New York City's rich history through the creation of public monuments on City property. DCLA is pleased to be a part of this endeavor. Nominations from over 2,000 New Yorkers generated a list of 300 worthy individuals, groups of women, or events in women's history. Based on that list, five new monuments to women, one in each borough, have been announced, starting with Shirley Chisholm last November. This will essentially double the number of monuments honoring real women from history in the City's collection. It is a step on the path to more fully, accurately, and

equitably reflecting the stories and contributions of
all New Yorkers in our city's public art.

I'd like to wrap up with an update on City
Council initiatives. Together, these programs would
be larger than the entire cultural budget of most
American cities. We hope to see funding for these
initiatives once again added at adoption and they
are: The Coalition of Theaters of Color received
nearly \$2 million in Fiscal Year 2019, enabling 44
organizations to serve audiences and artists citywide
and greatly increase the number of people of color
whose stories are shared through the theater.

Over \$6 million went to 182 organizations as part
of Cultural Immigrant Initiative. I think we can all
agree that New York City, a city of immigrants, can
only benefit from amplifying the voices of people
from all cultural backgrounds.

Art as a Catalyst for Change continues to form
important collaborations between arts organizations
and elementary and middle schools to mobilize
communities against gun violence.

An even larger opportunity to bring art into the
lives of New York City's students is the Cultural
After-School Adventure Program, or CASA.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

81

programs, 15 in each council district, were funded for this current academic year. In my days working in the museum world, I saw firsthand how great CASA can be. It's much more than the huge opportunity to provide in depth afterschool programming for kids in public schools. It can also create strong ties between cultural organizations and individual schools. And it gave us, the cultural institutions, the chance to work in depth with talented teaching artists.

Last but not least, since New Yorkers of all ages benefit from art and culture, we have SU CASA. In addition to serving seniors through over 250 programs, this partnership with five borough arts councils enable us to provide employment for over 100 teaching artists. Since I've been Commissioner, I have made it a point to visit a number of SU CASA programs. All were well received by the senior centers and their clients. This program is a great model for creative aging initiatives around the country.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I'm happy to answer questions to may have at this time.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

82

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much
Commissioner Finkelpearl for ending your testimony
with a great review of the City Council's Cultural
initiatives. I am extremely proud of the work, we at
that Council have done. Just looking at those
initiatives, just in the last several years while
I've been the Chair of the Committee, we have
increased that pot by over \$20 million to now \$33
million \$600,000 that the Council alone, which is a
significant investment in the Council.

So, I wanted to begin addressing a couple things.
Since you began your testimony by talking about Tim
Thar retiring, I saw that your 2020 Preliminary Plan
for your agency reflects two fewer staff members than
you had the previous year. I don't know if that
reflects Tim's departure as well but why the
reduction in staff and a broader question is, do you
have enough staff at the Department of Cultural
Affairs to move the funding that you do receive
through as quickly as you need to move it through?

TOM FINKELPEARL: Yes, so those staff members,
the headcount reduction, which was something that
happened at quite a few agencies, don't have a
bearing on the moving of the grants through. So, one

1 was at the Building Community Capacities and the
2 other was I believe at Materials for the Arts. I'm
3 sorry, there was an HR line that hadn't been filled
4 for a while, but it wasn't one that has any bearing
5 on the CDF unit. So, that Tim Thar line, the
6 direction of the CIG unit, which he held for 25 years
7 is still there. These were again, in areas of the
8 agency. Look, it's never easy to cut staff, these
9 were vacancies that existed, and they don't affect
10 the speed with which grants are processed.
11

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Do you have enough staff
13 to move all of the money through as quickly as you
14 could? Obviously, we have seen a tripling of CASA in
15 the last five years. We've seen new initiatives,
16 like the Cultural Immigrant initiative and SU CASA,
17 that's \$10 million additional dollars. We're talking
18 about \$22 million or so in new money that the City
19 Council has added just in the last five years and are
20 you able to effectively move that through giving the
21 staffing levels that you've got?

22 TOM FINKELPEARL: Yes, I believe we have adequate
23 staffing levels. It's you know, a very, very
24 hardworking group of people, especially seasonal,
25 that there are crashes of work that happen especially

in the fall and the spring, especially for certain parts of the agency, but that's kind of **[inaudible 2:36:16]**. It is a group of people that is large enough to process the workload.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: You mentioned in your testimony the \$5 million that was baselined at adoption for your agency last year. What is that \$5 million for?

TOM FINKELPEARL: So, I'd like to answer it by saying, we got \$20 million at adoption. I can go through exactly how that money was because I think, also I've just heard there's a rumor that not all of it has been spent. It all has been spent and I'd like to just say, so of the \$20 million, \$6.5 million went to the Cultural Institution Group for increases. \$5.25 million went across the board increases at the CDF and I'm happy to provide you with this document. \$1.45 million went to the Cultural Institution Group with special targeting of what's called the SIAP neighborhood. It's a social impact of the arts, it was a study done a couple years ago that identified neighborhoods in the city that were particularly underserved.

The Individual Artists grants in the Borough Arts Council \$2 million went to that, I think as you know. CreateNYC initiatives were \$3 million \$550,000 and that includes the Community Cultural, Disability Forward fund, Mayor's Grant for Cultural Impact and then the Energy Coalition which are those groups that are on our property that are our tenants which are not CIG's, got the \$1.25 million.

So, that's where that money went. The \$5 million was never specifically designated within that, but the \$20 million is accounted for and was all spent. I'm happy to provide that to you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, back to the original question, so of the \$5 million that you said was not specifically designated for any one particular thing, has all of that been spent?

TOM FINKELPEARL: Yes, yes, that's included in here. It's included in here, it was never pointed, that \$5 million was never pointed at a particular program. It was something that was being worked on.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right, so we're seeing that it's still in the office of the Commissioner. In the program area for the Office of the Commissioner and has not been spent.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

86

1
2 TOM FINKELPEARL: No, the money, I can assure you
3 the money has been spent. This accounts for the
4 entire \$20 million. The \$5 million was \$5 million of
5 that \$20 million was at adoption was baselined. The
6 entire \$20 million has spent therefore that \$5
7 million has been spent and again, I'm happy to
8 provide you with this.

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay, I suspect we will
10 be following up.

11 TOM FINKELPEARL: Okay.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Because we're talking
13 about the baseline portion of that, that's talk about
14 you peg. And it is larger then the peg for most
15 agencies in the City of New York and from my cursory
16 look at every single agency in the City of New York,
17 you're in the top ten with a 4.1 percent cut to your
18 agency, \$6.25 million. Have you had conversations in
19 the Administration about why the Department of
20 Cultural Affairs received such a large peg?

21 TOM FINKELPEARL: So, we have been speaking with
22 OMB since the peg targets were announced. So, I mean
23 I have seen the list as well of all the agencies.
24 You know, there are agencies that were in this same
25 range, you know, 3 or 4 percent is a large percentage

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

87

of the agency. Some of the very big agencies which
had huge cuts in terms of amounts of money, like DOE.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, I'm not asking you
about DOE, this is not the Education Committee, this
is the Cultural Affairs Committee.

TOM FINKELPEARL: I understand.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, lets talk about the
peg to the Department of Cultural Affairs, which yes,
your overall budget is smaller then the Department of
Education and the NYPD but as a percent of your
budget, it's larger than most of the cuts that are
being proposed and what I'm trying to get at is why
is the Administration in this peg program deemphasize
the importance of Cultural in the Arts?

TOM FINKELPEARL: Well, I'm not sure that I
completely agree with that, saying the deemphasizing
the importance of Cultural in the Arts.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: By giving a
disproportionally large cut to the Department of
Cultural Affairs, you are deemphasizing the
importance of the Arts and Culture in the City of New
York.

TOM FINKELPEARL: So, our cultural budget is
still by far the largest cultural budget in America.

It is proportionally also much larger than many other cities, so I don't think it to say that we have \$151 million reflects a disregarding of Arts in Culture.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Obviously, the they disregard but let me just ask you to answer the question I asked. Obviously, Deputy Mayor Glen is no longer with the Administration and therefore, not directly overseeing the Department of Cultural Affairs. So, who is it that you're speaking to about this and who is the champion within this Administration for this community and have you received an answer, if you've asked the question, as to why DCLA received a disproportionately large peg?

TOM FINKELPEARL: So, the answer to the first part of the question, which is who's my boss at this very moment. So, the portfolio of Alicia Glen has not yet been distributed out, so my boss at this moment is Dean, who's the First Deputy Mayor. I have not yet spoken to him about this but this is something that is absolutely on the agenda to be discussed in my first meetings with my new boss and my new boss will be a Deputy Mayor who will be assigned, hasn't obviously been assigned yet, but

that will be something I will speaking directly to
Dean about.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, these are
important days, so I hope we have some clarity to
those questions, both for yourself but also for the
community at large and again, we are not disputing
the fact that the City of New York and the Department
of Cultural Affairs has a funding level that is
larger than virtually any place in this country but
we are also the largest City in the country and we
are the cultural capital of the world and we should
have an even greater budget.

TOM FINKELPEARL: Just let me emphasize also,
it's not just any city, it's any state. Any city or
state. Next to the federal government, we are number
two and there's nobody close and again, you know, we
should be bigger than every city. We also have the
biggest Fire Department, The biggest Police
Department.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Sure, but we should have
even a bigger budget for the Department of Cultural
Affairs to actually serve the city and that's why you
know, we're disturbed and you know, we understand the
Administration is going through this exercise but

1 when I looked at the number and I look at the number,
2 it's larger than a lot of other agencies and I am
3 concerned when I see that. I assume you are as well.

4 TOM FINKELPEARL: I think if you ask Commissioner
5 whether they are happy to be making the cut, they're
6 going to say they're not. I think it's also a new
7 financial reality that we're in, in terms of the way
8 you know, we have experts who are looking at tax
9 revenues and how their coming in and how much money
10 we have to spend and that's why the Mayor asked for
11 \$750 million of cuts and you know, it's been the
12 first time since I've been Commissioner that we've
13 had a peg and we're trying to figure out exactly how
14 to address it. But I think you know, of course, if
15 you ask me, could we spend more money responsibly,
16 the answer would be yes. But it's also again, just
17 to reiterate still by far the largest amount of money
18 in the City in America.

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right, so let's talk
20 about how we're going to fight it and not except the
21 fact that we're going to be making cuts. I don't
22 accept that framework. So, what is the plan to fight
23 the peg and if our fight weren't successful where are
24 you going to do this? How are you going to do this?
25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

91

TOM FINKELPEARL: So, I mean look, I'm part of the Administration and I'm presenting the Administrations Preliminary Budget, so you know obviously there's going to be ongoing discussions that we have that are happening citywide with all the different agencies about how to address it. We have just gotten on Wednesday the peg target. So, we are looking to do something that's fair that doesn't cut disproportionately from either the CIG or the program groups. How to keep going some of the programs that we've done that do cost money. So, a lot of the programs that were in the cultural plan, are not actually about money, they are about policy. So, obviously things like the diversity planning can go forward. So, we have a lot of math to do and I think how the cut will be distributed. Again, where we had a \$5 million baseline increase and a \$6 million peg. So, we're one \$1 million less in term of the money that was allocated to each of these funding categories compared to where we were last year.

So, you know, that's stuff we don't have an answer at this hearing to that. This hearing is presenting the preliminary budget and the peg is quite a new thing that we're working on now.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

92

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right, so I just want to say \$5 million baseline increase, \$6 million cut, does not equal a \$1 million cut it equals a \$6 million cut. Right, lets be clear. We can't do that fuzzy math here, right, like because people are going to see less and in so, it's a reduction. The reduction is the reduction, is the reduction, right, we're not and we shouldn't try and make it seem like it's less harmful then it really is.

So, what is your exact peg for FY 20?

TOM FINKELPEARL: \$6 million. So, there's the peg for this year is the \$230,000 or whatever it is, which is as opposed to other agencies, we have already given away the money. We can't do a peg, a mid-year peg against the groups that are sitting over here. So, it's a very small peg this year, so almost the entire peg is next year. So, that's the \$6 million is for next year.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right, which makes it even worse somehow to through it all into next years, I mean, the coming fiscal years budget. So, that's really problematic and you have not had a conversation yet with anyone in the Administration

about this because you don't yet know who you are
direct.

TOM FINKELPEARL: No, I've been speaking to OMB,
I just haven't been speaking to a Deputy Mayor yet.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay, and obviously Dean
as the First Deputy Mayor would be a good person to
talk to.

TOM FINKELPEARL: Of course.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Alright, I have some
more questions, but I'm sure my colleagues and we've
been joined by Council Member Karen Koslowitz from
Queens. I know that Council Member Borelli has some
questions, so I'm going to ask him to do that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Thank you.
Commissioner, I just want to stay on one topic. I
sent you a letter and I'm not criticizing you for not
responding it, it was only sent last week. But now
that you're here, I just want to ask some questions
about historic Richmond Town. Can you tell me how
the Quonset huts that were built there, how that
project came to and who approved those designs?

TOM FINKELPEARL: Yes, and I was just at the
board meeting there last week. So, those facilities,
it was a DDC capital project and that they were

designed, built and installed in collaboration of course with the historic Richmond Town. In other words, it's not something where they just show up one day. For years, there was a discussion back and forth on this.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Sure, does DDC handle most of the DCLA capital budget?

TOM FINKELPEARL: DDC and EDC and then there are projects that are called CCG's which are Cultural Capital Grants and funding agreements with EDC for organizations that are doing their own capital projects. But, yes, DDC does a large number of our capital projects.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Who approved the design of them? Was that a DCLA approval or DDC approved it?

TOM FINKELPEARL: So, I mean, we're the funding agency and DDC is the construction agency, but that's also done in collaboration with the cultural institution and then the actual design is approved in terms of what it looks like by the public design commission because its on public property.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Do you know of any other example where a product that was funded through

DCLA's capital budget has not met -- I don't even want to say it just hasn't met specifications. Can you sight any other example of DCLA funded capital projects that have no functional use whatsoever?

TOM FINKELPEARL: When you say they have no functional use. They're not being used presently because there are problems.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Well, they're not artistically pleasing. You know, they're not beautiful things in and of themselves but there to store carriages and they can't store carriages. I noticed you have the Met Skylights Capital Project and that's wonderful, I love the Met. I imagine they're being replaced because they're not functional anymore.

TOM FINKELPEARL: That's correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: So, why would this project not be sort of on the same height of priority. I mean, it seems to me that both DCLA and DDC have sort of thrown their hands up and said, well you know, we signed off on it. We can't get the money back and now we're just SOL, as they say.

TOM FINKELPEARL: Yeah, so, we're formulating a response. We did just get the letter. I would be

1 happy to visit this site with you and talk to you
2 about what can be done. I think its absolutely the
3 case that in the long run those, you call the Quonset
4 huts, call them storage units, will have a function
5 that the carriages will move in there. I absolutely
6 hear your frustration and it's something that has to
7 be fixed.
8

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: And that goes into the
10 second part of the problem though, is that where does
11 the money come from? Because an individual Council
12 Member, sure collectively we have a large capital
13 budget, but each member is typically given only \$5
14 million. Am I going to have to go back to the money
15 that's designed for my constituents in this year to
16 somehow fund a rehashing of this project? I mean,
17 you have a \$1.1 billion capital budget. Is that where
18 it's going to come from?

19 TOM FINKELPEARL: That's a four-year plan.
20 That's everything commutatively.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: So, you have a \$250
22 million capital budget a year plan right, so I have a
23 \$5 million capital budget per year, so I have \$25
24 million over four year. You have ten times more than
25 me. Can we find somehow the money to repair this?

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

97

TOM FINKELPEARL: Look, again, I don't know the specifics well enough. Again, I have visited those.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Say yes, just say yes.

TOM FINKELPEARL: But I would be happy to visit the site with you and work out a solution. I feel the way that you do, that those things need to work. We need to find a function; we need to figure out what the problems are and fix it. So, I'm happy to visit the site with you and figure it out.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: I look forward to visiting with you and I hope our friends from the NYPL bring their little catchy umbrellas because we're going to need them if we go.

TOM FINKELPEARL: I understand the problem. Again, I'm not the capital guy. We should visit with DDC together with my capital unit. I'm happy to go with you to that site.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Rest assured I'll be asking DDC the same questions.

TOM FINKELPEARL: I'm sure you will. Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: So, I appreciate it. Thank you.

TOM FINKELPEARL: And by the way --

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Can you at least admit they're ugly? I mean they are ugly.

TOM FINKELPEARL: No, that's actually what I was going to say.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: I mean somebody in the public design commission. I mean, the public design commission is actually highlighting this as one of their achievements, which is beyond me. I mean, it's like someone smoked pot and watched MASH and put Quonset huts in the middle of a historic village.

TOM FINKELPEARL: Yeah, so I mean look, that's where it comes to opinion and, I actually kind of think they look great. They are off to the side, by the way, just so everybody knows. They're not in the middle of the historic village, they're off to the side. They're a large-scale building's that were built to hold the carriages. So, that aesthetic decision was certainly not mine, it was not yours obviously, but I'm happy to go there and the functional question must be solved. So, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. So, first let me just say I appreciate the Staten Island realness that Council Member Borelli is bringing to this hearing and you got some Queen's realness to.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

99

So, to make it even more citywide, Brooklyn I think, has some questions for you as well with Laurie Cumbo.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Thank you, Chair Van Bramer and thank you Commissioner for being here today. I wanted to jump right into the questions that Council Member Van Bramer brought up. If these were already answered I can refer back later.

So, the peg that is astonishingly being put forward, what will that actually impact?

TOM FINKELPEARL: So, listen, we just got the peg numbers on Wednesday. We are working on that, you know, there's going to be more news as the next weeks come forward but that hasn't been assigned yet.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: So, when they make a reduction in that way, in terms of cost savings, it's just done with a blunt tool? It's not looked at very carefully in terms of detail of what this will impact. Will it impact the programmatic groups? Will it impact the CIG's? Will it impact the other programmatic groups? It's just, we made a reduction of \$4.1 million or whatever it is, deal with it and then it's up to you to figure out where that cut comes from?

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

100

TOM FINKELPEARL: So, I wouldn't say that, but I would say that there's quite a bit of input by the agencies on how they plan to execute the peg. So, they, OMB, and the whole group that put together the citywide pegs, does have opinions about how the peg should operate but it's absolutely up to us to work with them to understand where the cuts could come with the least pain.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I think the challenge with it is because all of us all know each other very well and we all know each other's backgrounds and we all know the things that inspire us and that our passions and why we get up in the morning and do the work we do every day, but this is just astonishing with all of the work that we've been doing all of these years to try to basically increase a wrong of an agency that has been systematically underfunded for generations.

And so, now we're at a place where we've just done a cultural plan and we've gone to all five boroughs to talk about what it is that the arts community needs more of and now, we're at a place where with all of the work that we've done and all of the anticipation we've garnered for how this cultural

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

101

plan is going to be implemented throughout the city to see such a dramatic reduction or to move backwards in any way is really a departure from that. And to me, I've always seen the arts, and this is not the right wording, but it's the cash cow of New York City. It's one of the few agencies that actually brings forward revenue to the city. So, if we continue to minimize the reason why everyone's coming to New York City. We're going to really hurt every other agency and I know many other people don't see it that way but when we look at our hotels, our restaurants, when we look at transportation, when we look at our local small businesses, when we look at our schools. When we look at all these different things, you know from Broadway to the smaller cultural institutions in the outer boroughs, this is really the bloodline of New York City and I can only see increases that would dramatically attract more people to the city. I mean, we've seen it time and time again, when you see a public art project like the Gates, that comes to Central Park, we see dramatically the impact that it increases the revenue in the city. So, I just don't understand us moving backwards in this way and increases that we've made

in the past should not justify why we would see a decrease of this magnitude.

TOM FINKELPEARL: Well, I mean, I think obviously a lot of what you said is very similar to what we've said. I think arts and cultural are extremely important to the fabric of the city. You know, obviously the tourism side is not my bailiwick, that's NYC and Company but it absolutely does tie in. That half the tourists -

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: They're married.

TOM FINKELPEARL: Yes, half the tourists that come to New York City arts and culture is the first or second reason that they came here. So, again, look, we're looking forward to what might happen at adoption, as what has happened in previous years. This is a \$151 million budget; I just don't think it's quite fair to say it's minimizing it. I think that this is a very large amount of money which serve corps services. A lot of the corps services of what we do are funded here at a level that's adequate to get the job done.

So, again, you know, I think as I said before, any Commissioner is going to come forward. I'm not disagreeing with what you just said. I'm just saying

1
2 that these are the realities of our financial
3 situation right now in terms of tax revenues, whats
4 coming into the **[inaudible 3:10:47]**. Something has
5 to be done and that's why the Mayor asked for \$750
6 million of cuts.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I'll pause on that because
8 I could go on and on and on for days in that way but
9 again, this is an agency that does bring in revenue
10 for the city and the challenges that, and we know,
11 expenses increase every single year. So, even to
12 stay flat is a reduction. So, it's the ability to
13 continue to move forward and to lift up all bolts
14 through an increase in the cultural world has
15 beneficial impacts for everyone.

16 I wanted to talk very specifically to the project
17 in my district. I asked earlier about the Brooklyn
18 Public Library and the other organizations that are
19 part of it. It's been very difficult to understand
20 where in the timeline this process is happening
21 because it's always disappointing when development
22 happens with a cultural or not for profit spaces and
23 they're very much considered an after thought in
24 terms of the development.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

104

1
2 TOM FINKELPEARL: Yes, so you're talking about
3 the Ashland Place across from BAM. So, look, we've
4 talked about this before but again, I'm also happy to
5 have a meeting with you specifically to give you all
6 the details. This is a situation in which the
7 property has to be transferred to the city as a condo
8 deal and then the condo is licensed to the cultural
9 crews which is 651, **[inaudible 3:12:53]** and the
10 Brooklyn Public Library.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: And BAM.

12 TOM FINKELPEARL: And BAM theaters, yes, sorry,
13 BAM. Yeah, so there's four cultural organizations or
14 three cultural organizations and a library or how
15 ever you want to say it ready to go and look, this is
16 something there was new paper article about this last
17 week and the EDC said we are dedicated. We are
18 coming to the finish line quickly on this deal and we
19 want to get started soon. So, again, I'm happy to
20 give you all the details with the people that
21 actually know all the details, but I am watching this
22 and trying to push it forward as much as I can.
23 Folks at EDC are doing the same things. It's a
24 complicated negotiation for residential building.
25 So, there's all kinds of questions about access and

1 you know, who's going to use which elevator and all
2 of these kinds of very, very specific questions that
3 are being negotiated and try to get to the finish
4 line on that. So, we do want to, we have the money
5 in place. We have designs that look great that are
6 ready to go and we need to get the condo deal done so
7 that we can start construction. Every body agrees on
8 that.

9
10 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: All of that confusion that
11 you just put forward in terms of the complications,
12 and then the we want to see it done quickly. The
13 quickly has been a long quickly. So, it's difficult
14 to get through those complications in order to arrive
15 at where we need to be for this particular project.
16 So, definitely would like to and appreciate have a
17 conversation with you further about it.

18 I just want to close with one more question just
19 to get an understanding and I apologize Council
20 Member Van Bramer if you have already done this, but
21 given that it's women's history month, I certainly
22 want to focus in on She Built NYC. What is the
23 timeline now, now that we have introduced five
24 different sculptures? Pleased about the selection of
25

all of them and the placement. Can you talk a bit about what is the timeline for this project?

TOM FINKELPEARL: And thank you also for your wonderful advocacy on behalf of Shirley Chisholm. So, we have the others in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, Staten Island. We have now, the announcement has been made, the sites have been selected and artist selection is going to begin. So, again, the timeline I believe that the announcement was 2020 and 2021 they will be finished. So, its art percent for our team is working in each of those bureaus to put together panels and you know the percent for our process is and actually it was more community input that was mandated by a law that you all sponsored last year.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: We know it well.

TOM FINKELPEARL: You know it well. All that is happening on each of these projects, so there's that community engagement.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: So, additional resources have been put in the percent for art program to complete these projects?

TOM FINKELPEARL: Yes, so yes, we were able to hire an extra person. So, there is now an extra

1 person whose job it is specifically to work on the
2 monuments. Yeah, because we knew it would be a lot of
3 extra work. So, the resources were simply human
4 resources. Its not a matter of money, the money is
5 capital money, but we have to execute the process.
6

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: So, just in closing, on
8 the percent for art program, now that we have
9 actually increased the amount of money that can be
10 spent on the percent for art program. I asked this
11 at another hearing but would like a further update.
12 Where are we with the percent for art program now
13 that we've increased the budget? Has the amount of
14 public art been expanded to include more public art
15 throughout the city or are you still working with the
16 same threshold?

17 TOM FINKELPEARL: So, what's happened is that the
18 projects that are being commissioned have higher
19 amounts of money associated with them. That has
20 kicked in, that has already started happening. So,
21 the number of projects we're working on is similar
22 but plus the women's monuments. So, what didn't
23 change in the law was sort of whats applicable? What
24 kind of project gets a percent for art project? What
25 happened with the law was there is a higher threshold

per year in terms of the cap but also, a higher amount of money per project. So, what it does is much better, bigger, more fabulous, projects and then what's really increased the numbers has also been the addition of the She Built and the monuments, it's not just She Built, the monuments commission. So, there are more projects being done citywide, some of them are being done through percent for art and some of them are being done with the additional \$10 million of capital money that was associated with the monuments commission.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: And how do you with the percent for art program and I've always had difficulty understanding this because there are so many capital projects throughout the city that millions of dollars are going into many different capital projects. How do you select which project is going to qualify for a percent for art program?

TOM FINKELPEARL: So, there are things in the law that actually indicate that. So, things like if it's a below grade DEP project that really pipes under the street and you don't see it, that wouldn't qualify. Or if it's something behind closed doors where the public can't get to it. So, it has to be a public

1 site and it has to be a public manifestation above
2 ground, whatever, in public and then it's a matter of
3 prioritizing on the basis of the size and prominence
4 of the capital construction project. So, something
5 like you know, a very prominent library or all
6 schools or a park will get a project where something
7 that doesn't have a lot of foot traffic and is
8 distant will not. So, that's a negotiation with the
9 other agencies and then we have the cap. So, we
10 negotiate up to the cap, do you understand what I'm
11 saying? So, you have a cap of the amount of money
12 you can spend per year.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I do but the only thing is
15 like you used the word, with all due respect, you
16 used the word prominent right, so, everybody's
17 prominent might be different. So, I would like to
18 figure out a way to create a more I guess democratic
19 process because the pipes under the ground are one
20 thing. I totally get that, but then there are so
21 many projects that are above ground from parks to
22 libraries to cultural institutions. I would love to
23 see in my dream world, but it doesn't have to be a
24 dream in terms of housing, projects that qualify for
25 affordable housing. Many of these buildings are

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

110

1 being built without an artistic eye or component to
2 create any level of uniqueness to the design. I
3 would love to see more elements like that because
4 many of these buildings the only artistic thing
5 that's happening might be the big chandelier in the
6 lobby. We want to see more than that in the design.
7 So, I look forward to talking with you more about
8 that when we have our meeting.

9
10 TOM FINKELPEARL: Sure.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: And I'll turn it back over
12 to Council Member Van Bramer.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. So,
14 Commissioner, I just have to say I heard you say
15 something in response to a Council Member question
16 that disturbed me a great deal and that is that with
17 the peg you said that it would be adequate to get the
18 job done, right? And, I just want to say, with all
19 due respect, I know that you work for the Mayor, but
20 you are also the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs and
21 we need to see more fight in you, right? It is
22 horrible for you to say that with this cut the
23 funding would still be adequate to get the job done.
24 That is not true and even if it were true, we damn
25 sure shouldn't be putting up the white signal, the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

111

white flag of surrender at this particular stage in the budget negotiations, right? We need to be fighting like heck and making sure that everyone understands that that is not adequate to get the job done. We need more money, not less money and you and I were there during the Mayor's Queens week to make the very announcement that we had finally eclipsed \$200 million in the budget for the Department of Cultural Affairs, an all-time record and I know you want that and fought for that with all of us, but here we are less than a year later looking at a really substantial proposed cut to that number. You and I were there, it was part of the Mayor's big week in Queens and part of his big announcement. So, what we should all be talking about and what I think, that folks within reason are looking to you for is that fight and that leadership to say, when you're in those rooms with Deputy Mayor Fuleihan and others, that you're banging on tables and overturning tables, because I know that's what I'm doing in the budget negotiating team. We fight like hell for the people that we represent and so, I just want to ask if you'd like to revisit that because there's no way that we should be saying at this stage that a \$6.2 million

cut is adequate to the job done in terms of
adequately funding the arts and adequately
representing the people that we serve.

TOM FINKELPEARL: So, what I can say is so, first
of all I'm not generally speaking an overturning the
table guy, but I'm also not a guy that has, I mean, I
think that you've seen the results of our budgets
over the last years have been excellent and I'm going
to do what I've done in previous years, which is to
be a good champion of the important work that the
these folks over here do on behalf of New York City.

So, that's how I will operate which is, I'm going
to operate as I have in the past so I can obviously
assure you that I am a voice in the Administration
that says that Arts and Culture is paramount to the
health of the city and we've seen that in terms of
economics as Councilwoman Cumbo said, the tourism
site. It's also paramount to the health of low-
income communities that aren't necessarily tourist
attractions that having arts and cultural
demonstrably a good thing for those communities as
was proven in the social impact of the arts study.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Absolutely true. Do you
believe that we will have the resources adequate to

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

113

get the job done if we receive a \$6.2 million cut to
the Department of Cultural Affairs?

TOM FINKELPEARL: I think that the funding level
proposed — I am here presenting the Mayor's Budget
and this is how the Cultural Affairs Commissioner,
I've been at these hearings on the other side of the
fence for years as well as on this side of the fence,
that this is the basic budget that we have now, we'll
see what happens with adoption. I am absolutely
convinced that we have spent well, the tax payers
money with this \$2 million budget that we celebrated
out at Flushing Town Hall. So, again, I'm going to
be the advocate for my agency within the
Administration.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay, look, I want to be
respectful. I want to be respectful to you as a
Commissioner and to your role within the
Administration understanding that there are certain
limitations to what you can do and what you can't do.
What you can say, what you can't say, but you know, I
don't think I'm the only person in the room who
really wants to feel more passion for this fight and
we're different people, we have different styles. I
have banged on tables when it comes to the budget for

1 the things that I care about and that's fine if you
2 have a different style but I think in terms of these
3 fights, in terms of this community, in terms of our
4 leadership, you're the Commissioner I'm the Chair and
5 all these folks depend on us to be able to fight.
6 People are looking and yearning for more particularly
7 when we feel this and we see this, and there are
8 generalized feelings that maybe this Administration
9 doesn't love this community as much as it should.
10 But you and I are the equalizers here.

12 TOM FINKELPEARL: Yeah, so by the way, I never
13 said I hadn't banged on tables, I said I hadn't
14 overturned tables. I would like to make that
15 distinction.

16 No, look, I hear what your saying and I am
17 passionate about it. I also think that the prove is
18 in the putting. The best budgets we've ever had is
19 this year. I mean to say that the Administration
20 doesn't care about Arts and Culture, in a context
21 where and a lot of people, a lot of advocates fought
22 for it, a lot of you fought for it on the Council
23 side, but you know, which would you rather have. I
24 mean, this is an Administration that does care about
25 this issue that did the cultural plan. That spent

every spare moment of an entire year, not spare moment every moment listening to 20,000 New Yorkers and another 200,000 people on line. So, I do think that we're passionate about it and the results have been terrific. I have gotten increases starting with the illimitation of the old budget dance.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, but we're dancing right now. So, let me just say I'm very careful with my words generally speaking. I did not say the Administration doesn't care about Arts and Culture. Alright, I worded that differently. I will just say we need more; we need better and this is a fight for our lives, and we should look at all of these sorts of fights as a fight for our lives and for the things that we believe in and the values that we care about. So, this is the beginning, this is the preliminary budget hearing, but I assume this group believes as I do that there is a lot of fight in us to make sure that we get what we and the people of the City of New York deserve.

So, with that I am going to say, thank you to Commissioner Finkelpearl for being here. I look forward to continuing this discussion.

TOM FINKELPEARL: Thank you very much.

1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
2 INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

116

3 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And we have several
4 panels, we are going to hear from a library panel
5 first because they have been waiting for hours and
6 then we're going to hear from the first cultural
7 panel, and I'll mention all the names right now. So,
8 for the libraries it's Victoria Kowanetz, Danielle
9 Shapiro, Kokila Frank, I hope I got that right and
10 LaMeane Isaac. And then the cultural panel is going
11 to be Inez Asian, John Cavelli, Cathy Hung, and it
12 looks like Sorita Daftary.

13 So, in the interest of hearing from everyone as
14 quickly and efficiently as possible we're going to go
15 to a clock. So, I would just ask everyone to be as
16 synced as possible with your testimony. We are going
17 to these library panel and then we have a cultural
18 panel and then we have a couple more library folks
19 which we may interest first with some cultural folks
20 and we'll continue on from there. Who would like to
21 begin? Who is Victoria? Good, we're going to start
22 with Victoria is it Kowanetz, did I say it right?
23 Could you put your microphone on, the little red
24 light?

25 VICTORIA KOWANETZ: Kowanetz.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

117

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Ah, so I mispronounced
every name on this panel apparently.

VICTORIA KOWANETZ: It's okay.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay, go for it,
Victoria.

VICTORIA KOWANETZ: Okay, good afternoon, Chair
Van Bramer and the members of the Libraries
Committee. My name is Victoria Kowanetz and I am a
Children's Librarian at Seaside Community Library in
Queens. I am honored to be here to tell you the
amazing work we do at the Queens Library.

One of my fondest memories is of my mother
bringing my sister and I to the library. I
especially remember receiving my won library card.
As I signed my name, I felt so proud to have my
Queens Library card, which at the time was blue and
white, in my possession. I remember my mother
telling me stories of how my grandfather used to take
her to the Central Library to pick out books. She
would also use the bookmobile whenever it would come
by. Now, being an employee of Queens Library, I feel
everything has come full circle. I can share my love
of books and reading with others, just like my mother
did with me.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

118

One of the things I love about the library and my job is that the library is a place that means many different things to a diverse group of people. We help children do their homework, assist adults in their job search and conduct digital literacy classes for seniors. We help customers achieve their goals, find their purpose, or just escape the world for a little while with a good book. We have arts and crafts programs, movie viewings, and book clubs. The times of libraries being solely book dispensaries are long gone. We have so much to offer our customers.

As a Children's Librarian, one of my most favorite things is having a new child come to story time. It is great to see the transformation and progress from their first visit onward. From being shy and just learning the story time songs, to leading the group and welcoming new children joining the group; it is a rewarding and fun experience. I am grateful that I can have a positive influence on a child's life through my work at the library.

That is why I am here today. I witness the wonderful impact libraries have on every individual who walks through our doors. Our patrons rely on us to be there for them, and we want to be there for

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

119

1
2 them, but we need continued investment in our library
3 systems to allow us to do so. Without investment in
4 the public library systems, our customers will not
5 have a reliable and welcoming space to receive
6 programs and services. I hope the City Council and
7 Administration acknowledge the importance of public
8 libraries by increasing financial investment in them.

9 Again, thank you for giving me the opportunity to
10 testify here today.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much.

12 DANIELLE SHAPIRO: Good afternoon member of the
13 Cultural Affairs and Library Committees. First and
14 foremost, I would like to thank you for the support
15 of the libraries and taking time to listen to me this
16 afternoon. My name is Danielle Shapiro, I work at
17 the Highlawn Library located in Bensonhurst. The
18 only circular branch in the system which opened in
19 1972, previously housed in a storefront on West 6th
20 Street.

21 The libraries today provide a place where all
22 ages and ethnicities are welcome. During a regular
23 day we provide programming to all ages, some of the
24 programs we provide are toddler time, babies and
25 books, afterschool homework help, library lab,

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

120

robotics, teen tech time, and teen time, so we're an area where teens can socialize. For our adults and older adults, we offer dance classes, computer classes, painting and writing classes, jewelry workshops, citizenship classes and English as a second language, both classes and conversation groups. Some of the branches also offer conversation groups in other languages such as Japanese, Spanish and French. I am involved in two initiatives with outreach services. The book cart service where we visit local jails allowing people who are incarcerated the opportunity to access literature during their stay and answering letters sent from people who are incarcerated requesting information that will assist them when they reenter society.

In my 20 years working for the Brooklyn Public library system, I have had the opportunity of working in various locations throughout Brooklyn and meeting many families. Over several occasions, I have seen parents at outreach events or other locations, and they thank me for getting their children their first library cards and assisting them in the library. They are proud to tell me that their children are still active library users today and successful

1
2 either in high school or have graduated college. I
3 like many of our youth librarians do outreach to
4 schools and childcare centers reading stories,
5 hosting parent workshops and introducing new titles
6 we feel children or young adults will enjoy.

7 It's heartwarming when the child remembers you
8 later. On my way home the other night, a young girl
9 smiled and waved recognizing me from my visit to her
10 school. All of our libraries have seen an increase
11 of patrons coming in to access the internet, both on
12 our computers and via the Wi-Fi we offer.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Ms. Shapiro, can I ask
14 you to maybe read that paragraph and conclude there
15 but I promise you I'm reading your testimony and love
16 it.

17 DANIELLE SHAPIRO: Yes, okay. All of our
18 libraries have seen an increase in the patrons coming
19 in to access the internet, both on our computers and
20 via the Wi-Fi we offer. They are working on resumes,
21 school work, and social media, allowing them to keep
22 in touch with family and friends. After a full day
23 of studying at school, the children and teens use the
24 computers to play games to unwind. Very often the
25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

122

library is the primary source of access for our low-income New Yorkers.

Thank you once again for taking time to listen to my testimony.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much for your 20 years of service to the people of Brooklyn and the City of New York. And both of you happened to mention a first library card moment, either your own or providing that for a young reader and I got my first library card at the Broadway Library in Astoria Queens and it is also one of the highlights of my life that day, so thank you very much for reminding us all of that moment when we got our first library cards, next.

KOKILA FRANK: Good afternoon. My name is Kokila Frank and good afternoon Chairman Van Bramer and the Library Committees. I work for Brooklyn Public Library with Sunset Park Branch. I am also the constituent of Sunset Park; I have been living there for about 44 years.

I came to the United States in 1975 after I got married and have always lived there. Like I was excited for the first library card. It was a paper

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

123

card and then it was mailed to my house in 1975 and I
still have that card.

I worked for the Wall Street for 9 years and then
was a stay at home mom for 14 years. All these
years, I have always come to the library for books
and videos. Ever since my children and my Church
children were very young, I brought them to the
library. They loved the books, children videos,
various children's programs, arts and crafts and
loved reading is fundamental where they got free
books every three visits.

I 1997, I joined the BPL staff as a part timer.
On March 15, 1999, I became a full-time clerk. I
will be retiring on March 29th after 22 years and
just to say that I'm also happily married for 44
years.

We have grown here from catalog box, then
stamping due date cards to catalog computer and other
IT technologies. At this time and age, when
technology is on the rise, we require updated
computers and other devices. We are in need of
capital budget as well.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

124

Most of our buildings are aged and are in need of repair and other amenities. Where we thank that Sunset Park is going to get a new library.

We thank all the elected officials who also love the libraries and have always supported us. I have been to Albany 15 times for lobby day in all my service here.

All the officials promised us help and I'm glad to say that they have fulfilled them. I request all of you humbly to provide us with more funding so we can provide children, young adult, adults and seniors with their needs to develop I their lives.

We also have various programs in the branches, but our Sunset Park branch, this is a March calendar if you see, it's all full. We have a lot of programs for children.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: It's a little far away and slightly small print, but I'm just going to take your word for it.

KOKILA FRANK: Maybe while I get up, I'll just give you a copy. As you see, we have a lot of programs but at this time we have the Robotics competition and Sunset Park was the first place. We won the first place and this coming Saturday we are

going to be competing for the First Lego League State
Tournament where 64 teams will compete for
championship at City College of New York and then if
they win, they'll go to Nationwide. I think it's
going to be in Detroit.

I once again, I thank everyone for this
opportunity to bring before you various program and
funding needs for our libraries. I also specially
thank **[Inaudible 3:49:32]** for Government Affairs and
specially Ms. **[Inaudible 3:49:37]**. She is a very
good leader and she inspires all of us.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. I feel like
we learned a lot about you in the last two and a half
minutes.

KOKILA FRANK: Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And you're also very
inspiring because I would like to one day say that
I'm married for 44 years. That's pretty cool. I
would also like to one day say I retired and that's
pretty cool to as well as I wish I had my first
library card, I don't. I don't have that anymore.

KOKILA FRANK: Yeah, they laminated it and they
would mail it to us. We would go fill in the form and
the library cards were a paper, paper like this.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

126

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right.

KOKILA FRANK: And then they would laminate and
mail it to us.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, I know I think I
had that, but you kept yours for a long time and mine
is long gone. So, thank you very, very much, Ms.
Frank.

KOKILA FRANK: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: LaMeane?

LAMEANE ISAAC: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Alright.

LAMEANE ISSAC: Alright, good afternoon everyone.
Good afternoon Chair Van Bramer, it's a pleasure to
see you again and good afternoon library funding
committee members. My name is LaMeane Isaac. I am
the Branch Manager at the Macon branch. It's a
Carnegie branch located in Bedford Stuyvesant,
Brooklyn, it's also a landmark building.

Thank you, Committee members, for your generous
support of public libraries over the years. Due to
your generosity, Macon Library is able to be open for
53 hours a week, 7 days a week. So, we are
addressing a 7 day a week need in Brooklyn.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

127

For over a 100 years, the library staff at Macon has been serving the community. As a direct result of service hours, our multigenerational programs and attendance have increased significantly at Macon.

Due to this funding of the Library Committee, collaborative partnerships, we offer programs and services for all ages as many of my colleagues have already spoken about.

Also, with the assistance of the increased library hours we are able to form partnerships. We were able to just recently offer an OSHA class which stands for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration class. A 30-hour OSHA class which we know is extremely important. We were also able to support Mother Coders, which allow mothers to learn Coding at our library location and patrons who participate in that program were able to receive free childcare, which is amazing.

The library is a safe haven as you all know for many of the New York City most vulnerable young children, older adults, the homeless, and many others. With continued and increased support from the Library Funding Committee, the library will be able to increase their outreach in the communities

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

128

1 that they serve. Patrons served will benefit and the
2 library will continue to be a place of life-long
3 learning, opportunities, and discovery but as you
4 know, the library has structural needs because we've
5 been forced to close our doors several times due to
6 extreme heating conditions whether it's too hot in
7 the summer or too cold in the winter.
8

9 We also have issues with elevators, we use trash
10 cans to collect water that pool in the building when
11 it rains or snows. So, Funding Committee, I employ
12 you to please continue to support the Public
13 Libraries and increase funding so that we can
14 continue serving our communities and so that we can
15 address the infrastructure needs of our buildings,
16 especially Carnegie buildings that have been serving
17 the community for well over 100 years.

18 So, Committee, I thank you and I employ you to
19 continue to support us. Thank you very much.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. We thank you
21 for all of the work that you do on behalf of the
22 patrons and residents of your various communities and
23 you know, when you said that when you got your first
24 library card at the Seaside branch right?
25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

129

VICTORIA KOWANETZ: Well, I work at the Seaside
Branch, but I got mine at Howard Beach.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Howard Beach and then
when you got your job at the Queens Library it was
like full circle. I had that very same life
experience having worked for the library for eleven
years before I got elected, so I really appreciate
the work that all of you do on behalf of the people
of New York City. So, we say thank you to you. It's
our job to fight for people and libraries and I love
that more than anything in the whole world. So,
thank you very, very much.

PANEL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And we will hear from
John Calvelli, Cathy Hung, I think it's Ines Asian,
and I think its Sarita Daftary, but I could have that
wrong. If those four folks are still in the room. I
know I have John and Cathy. And are you Sarita or
Ines.

SARITA DAFTARY: I am Sarita.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Which one?

SARITA DAFTARY: Sarita.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Sarita, okay and is Ines
Asian from the New York Historical Society. No, if

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

130

not, we will call someone else. Next up on the list
is Arthur Aviles.

Alright, John start.

JOHN CALVELLI: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. I
am John Calvelli, Executive Vice President of the
Wildlife Conservation Society, Chair of the Cultural
Institutions Group and a founding member of New
Yorkers For Culture and Arts. I am here today to
provide testimony on behalf of the CIG's, a coalition
of 33 cultural organizations who share a public,
private partnership with the City of New York and are
located in all five boroughs.

Let me begin by stating how grateful we are for
the Council's vital support for cultural in New York
throughout the years. Candidly having sat through
just the testimony before, your leadership and the
inspired leadership of the Council is one of the
reasons why we have the funding and the level of
support that we do in government today.

Like many of the CIG's, WCS has roots in diverse
neighborhoods throughout the City and our parks
connect local youth and families to science and
conservation through accessible and inspiring
programing. I'll cut through and just basically say

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

131

1 right now, we are collectively, just WCS last year
2 had over 1,400 young people that worked and learned
3 at WCS in communities where the poverty rate ranges
4 from 20 percent to 42 percent. More than 70 percent
5 of the youth who work, intern and volunteer at our
6 parks identify as young people of color. They hail
7 from 30 different countries and speak 31 different
8 languages. WCS, like the CIG's and the cultural
9 community are more than just what our mission states.
10 We not only inspire youth, but we provide them with
11 tools to transfer their gateway experience into their
12 long-term career goals. I think you raised that very
13 well in the prior testimony. We're much more than
14 just these institutions where people come to look at
15 art. They are being inspired every day and they're
16 creating incredible opportunities. I also serve on
17 the Board of NYC and Company and candidly, the
18 results I've shown that 77 percent of people coming
19 to New York are coming for a cultural experience.
20 So, the fact is we are candidly a major revenue
21 provider for the City of New York.

22 Long story short, I came here to say, we want to
23 be harmless at \$20 million but now I guess it's \$26.5
24 million based on what we just heard. We would ask
25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

132

1 that the Council look at the feasibility of bringing
2 our funding levels back to their FY 2009 level.
3 We're still not at our FY 2009 level. Both CIG and
4 program groups are supportive of using the same
5 distribution model that has been used for the past
6 three years.

7 I can go on, but I just want to say thank you for
8 the work that you're doing, and we look forward to
9 working with you through this legislative and budget
10 process.

11 CATHY HUNG: Good afternoon Chair. My name is
12 Cathy Hung, I am the Executive Director for Jamaica
13 Center for Arts and Learning, JCAL. I am here to
14 testify on the New York City cultural budget for
15 Southeast Queens.

16 JCAL offers comprehensive array of in-school,
17 after-school programs. Our School of the Arts, with
18 more than 300 enrollments every year offers people of
19 all ages the opportunity to pursue their creative
20 expressions. Through our various educational
21 programs, JCAL employed more than 35 teaching artists
22 last year. JCAL has a long history of supporting
23 both established and emerging artists through
24 residency and professional development programs.
25

1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND 133
2 INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

3 Last year, JCAL offered more than 14,000 free studio
4 hours to artists. Our work space residency has
5 supported artists for more than 30 years by offering
6 dedicated workspace and financial support.

7 Our newly launched co-work space supported local
8 artist and a small cultural organization at a rate of
9 \$200 per month for a secure private working space to
10 upgrade their small business.

11 Our Thursday Night Jazz Concert not only provided
12 performance opportunity for emerging jazz musicians,
13 but also brought in local homeless shelter residents
14 to experience live jazz music. Many of them are the
15 first time to a jazz concert.

16 Did I mention our new free College Access
17 Program? Last fall, the inaugural class of 18
18 students by end of this February, we have learned six
19 of them has been admitted through Early Action
20 process to Columbia, Cornell, John Hopkins,
21 University of Chicago and Vanderbilt, all with full
22 financial package. Why College Access? Because we
23 can. Because we want to make our resource available
24 to the community. We happen to have an expert on our
25 staff, so I bend his arm and make him do it.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

134

1
2 Next year, we are going to launch a new
3 partnership with Department of Probation and
4 Transitional Service in New York. A mental health
5 service and institute in Queens. So, park budget cut
6 is not adequate. We actually need more for what we
7 want to do next year.

8 So, your support's very important for us to
9 continue our work. We ask for a total of \$30 million
10 of cultural budget to be allocated for all New York
11 City culture.

12 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

13 SARITA DAFTARY: Hi, thank you for the
14 opportunity to testify. My name is Sarita Daftary
15 and I work for JustLeadershipUSA. We're probably
16 best known for the CLOSERikers campaign that we've
17 launched in New York City but here today we're here
18 to talk about divesting from law enforcement and
19 investing in the kinds of things that actually make
20 our community safe.

21 So, under the buildCOMMUNITIES umbrella, we
22 convened groups across New York City last year. 60
23 representatives from 30 different partner
24 organizations and advisors and 200 residents of
25 communities most impacted by mass incarceration and

we asked people what kinds of investments they thought would actually create safety and we heard libraries and cultural institutions coming up again and again and again.

Since we've mostly been talking about cultural budgets today, just to give us perspective, the City invests \$7.3 billion in different kinds of law enforcement every year. So, all of the things that we've all been talking about funding, we have the money, it's just disproportionately given to law enforcement and in doing so, our city applies law enforcement solutions to problems of public health and wellness, poverty and inequality. So, a few of the needs that we heard when we spoke to people in this past year about investments in communities, people asked for investment in public libraries to expand educational and recreational services. We support the Try Lies Budget increase requests for expenses and capital. People mentioned expanding services like ESL classes, computer training, task, preparation and career counseling, offering expanded free resources, like meeting space and printing.

Expanding the diversity of library offerings including programs and materials in multiple

languages and increasing the representative of New York City communities and investing in learning centers focused on activism and social justice.

People also mentioned established creative spaces and cultural hubs in communities for all creative discipline. Increasing funding to expand the creative spaces and cultural hubs that are accessible to the entire community and to support and sustain community institutions that serve as creative spaces and cultural hubs.

So, I'll stop there because you have my written testimony as well but just to summarize and say, that we know that we are speaking to the choir, but we want to be supportive in any way that we can to help you all challenge the approach through which the budget is always made, which is resourcing law enforcement first.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, thank you. I obviously am familiar with the organization but when you started to speak, I was wondering where we going and then I could not be happier. I mean obviously, I think I am pretty progressive on these issues anyway but the fact that your organization is taking a position based on the feedback that you've received,

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

137

1 you know, on behalf of both libraries and I would
2 argue our cultural really are an extension of that
3 because if we put more money into libraries and
4 cultural organizations and the education and the
5 outreach and the free services and everything, we
6 would dramatically change our society in so many ways
7 and you know, you wouldn't need jails if you had
8 libraries 24/7 and cultural and the arts in every
9 school and in the life of every child regardless of
10 zip code and income and their the best institutions
11 we've got and the most democratic institutions we've
12 got. Which is why I am proud to be the Chair of this
13 Committee for the last 10 years and fighting for
14 these things. So, I just think it's a really great
15 perspective though that your organization coming from
16 where you are coming from and in terms of this
17 particular part of the social justice movement are
18 there for libraries and culture as well. And I think
19 if the folks in the room, whoever is in libraries and
20 culture are smart. They'll be getting your number to
21 and saying, how do we amplify each other's voices.

22
23 JOHN CALVELLI: Let me give you my card.

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: There you go. So,
25 speaking of one of those great artists in cultural

organizations that I love in the Bronx, the very
talented Arthur Aviles.

ARTHUR AVILES: Good afternoon. Thank you so
much for hearing us out. So, my name is Arthur
Aviles. I am the co-founder along with Charles Rice-
Gonzales, who is the Executive Director and I am the
Artistic Director of BADD, the Bronx Academy of Arts
and Dance. It's an organization that's been holding
space in the Bronx for artists and audiences by
providing works that are empowering to women, people
of color and the LGBTQ communities for the past 20
years.

Through our programming, we support the
presentation and development of work by over 200
artists per year. For example, we support Barbra
Herr, a Bronx artist performer and advocate for the
queer and transgender community. In her words, BAAD
is an essential creative home for me and many other
artists who are trans, Latinx and people of color.
Its not easy to find places to create and present
work, but BAAD has provided support, a stage and pays
me as an artist for my work.

So, BAAD has presented Barbra Herr's shows and
she has been featured in our Trans Visionary

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

139

performance series where we work with South Bronx
restaurants to present transgender artists. Our work
in and out of our space expands the visibility of our
artists and creates the foundation for societal
change.

BAAD values Barbra Herr and the hundreds of
artists who work in our space each year and the
thousands of people who experience their art. Our
audience are 87 percent people of color, 65 percent
women, 74 percent identify as LGBTQ and we stand with
fellow cultural warriors to ask that the FY 20
Cultural Budget be kept at \$20 million and for the
Council to consider additional funding for both CIG
and our program group partners.

We ask that the \$10 million total that Culture
has previously received be baselined, inclusive to
the \$2.25 million baselined in last year's budget for
CIGs. Please distribute the initial \$10 million as
you have in the past three years. \$4.5 to CIGs, \$5
million to program groups and \$0.5 million to CUNY
Cultural Corps and divide evenly between the CIGs and
our program group partners the additional \$10 million
plus any enhanced cultural funding allocated in FY
20. So, BAAD loves New York City. We love the Bronx

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

140

and thank you for your dedication to keeping this city strong and for funding the arts and we thank this committee for all your fierce work in these matters. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much and I saw Barbra Herr perform at a gay club in Jackson Heights when I was young enough to go to gay clubs in Jackson Heights and the movie Chicago had just come out and she did a number of the songs from Chicago which is an amazing experience that I had. So, thank you for the work that obviously you do in creating a safe and welcoming artistic space for the LGBT queer of trans community. Really, really important obviously to me as a gay man, but also to all of us and we love your work and we love Charles Rice-Gonzalez as well.

So, needless to say with respect to this panel, you know where I am, and I am passionate about these things. So, I will be fighting with everything I have even overturning tables.

JOHN CALVELLI: I was going to say; will you be overturning tables?

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: You got to do what you got to do in this business and it's in the interest

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

141

of good, you know what I mean? So, much happens in
our world that isn't good and so much happens in
politics and government that isn't good. Fighting
for libraries and the arts is about as good as it can
get. So, turning tables, I think that's an Adel
song, but it's really, really important work and we
will all fight together for the things that we know
are important. So, thank you very much to this
panel. Next, we have Demetries Morrow, from the
Chocolate Factory, Lucy Sexton from New Yorkers for
Culture and Arts, Mark Rossier from New York
Foundation for the Arts, and Rocky Bucano, the
Universal of Hip Hop Museum and then we have one or
two more panels after that.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Is it Demetries?

DEMETRIES MORROW: Demetries.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: We'll start with you
Demetries and then go down the line to Rocky.

DEMETRIES MORROW: Okay, good afternoon and thank
you Chairman Van Bramer and members of the Committee
for giving me this opportunity. My name is Demetries
Morrow. I am fairly new to New York City and just
started working at The Chocolate Factory. Our
Executive Director, Sheila Lewandowski could not be

here and asked that I give my story to give a face to the fight for Arts and Culture. We have a Chocolate Factory stand with New Yorkers for Culture and the Arts asking for that \$20 million increase in 2019 to be baselined in 2020, with an additional \$10 million in 2020.

109 Willow Brook Drive, Clinton, Mississippi 39056 located on a corner lot, housed a very intimate cultural space that my family knew as The Stage. The Stage served as a vital place where not only creative expression but love and support and like, development of self. Growing up in Clinton, Mississippi, I sometimes felt like I was the weird kid because of my Blackness, my articulate speaking voice and like, my shyness in the worlds outside of my home.

But on the stage, my parent highly encouraged me to explore my creative side and even put up with weekends of me rehearsing, recreating scenes from movies like, Step Up and Honey on that stage.

My first professional dance experience happened when I was a member of RAT Pack which stood for Reject All Tobacco. A high school dance group that went around to younger elementary schools in Mississippi and talked about the effects of tobacco

and that was funded by the Department of Health in Mississippi, so it was this situation that I began to understand how creative expression really like progresses society as a whole. And then after high school, I went to the University of Mississippi but quickly realized that the culture of Ole Miss was deeply rooted in racism and elitism and that was not the place that I wanted to be.

After witnessing students protest the second term of Barack Obama and even like getting rejected from a fraternity just because I was Black, I went home for Christmas break and did not return the spring semester.

And went to community college the next semester and sometimes reflect on like my role in the world and questioned life in general. Lie, why was I no longer dancing? But also like, why did Mississippi state boundary signs say the Birthplace of America's music and why did the car tags say that we were celebrating the creative economy and how were we doing that and what does New York City claim? As we heard earlier today from you, we claim to be the cultural capital of the world as Deputy Cumbo, I think she said.

1 She said Arts and Culture is a cash cow and we
2
3 also heard that Arts and Culture are the fabric of
4 New York City. Whatever the claim may be, New York
5 City attracts people like me because of like the Lora
6 of the stage that has rich culture and serves as a
7 place of hope, progress and healing. Chair Van
8 Bramer and to all of the Council, I imagine that each
9 of your homes is rich with music, artwork, and a
10 stage of your own like the brick stage that I had at
11 my house. So, give more for the city's Department of
12 Health to support performances like the group RAT
13 Pack that I was in, for arts education to support
14 labor of artists so that diversity in the City can be
15 celebrated and as Pablo Picasso once said, every
16 child is an artist. The problem remains of how he
17 can remain an artist once they grow up. The
18 responsibility to our city is to support the artist
19 in all of us no matter what age you are. Again,
20 thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much.
22 That was a great journey through your young life and
23 I appreciate the story telling with the powerful
24 message behind it and as you well know, the Chocolate
25 Factory is in my district, so I look forward to

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

145

working with you in the coming months and years on
all things Culture and the Arts.

DEMETRIES MORROW: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Next, Lucy.

LUCY SEXTON: Hi Chair Van Bramer and City
Council members. Thank you for your critical and
greatly appreciated work supporting culture in our
city. I am Lucy Sexton, in addition, to being a
choreographer, a director, a SU CASA teaching artist
and lifelong New Yorker, I am the head of cultural
advocacy group, New Yorkers for Culture and Arts. We
are a coalition of groups and individuals across the
five boroughs working to ensure every New Yorker has
the right and opportunity to engage in culture to
express their humanity to strengthen their community.

I thought it was interesting at Speaker Johnson's
state of the city, that at the end of it talking
about transit, which was great. He listed all the
things that made New York City great, $\frac{3}{4}$ of them were
cultural, from the Mermaid Parade to Spike Lee. So,
we know culture makes our city great. Today, I want
to emphasize the proven data that shows how
engagement with culture improves nearly every aspects
of the many challenges facing New Yorkers. It's a

fact; when kids have access to culture, more of them stay in school and out of the criminal justice system. When neighborhoods have spaces to gather to share music, stories, dance, ideas, community is created and strengthened. When seniors have access to classes in gardening, painting, movement, they live longer, fact.

Last week's New York Times had yet another article detailing the proven impact of arts on learning. The article reports that the effect arts made in overall learning was largest among the children who were less strong academically. The "lower performers". "We found the biggest difference with children at the lower level of achievement,". "Could this be at least one lever for closing an achievement gap?" I've included the article in my remarks, I hope you get a chance to read it.

Too often people talk about New York's culture, going to a museum or botanic garden or poetry reading, like its decorations we put on a tree and the arts as we see are always the one's that are cut first, that has to stop. I want to compare us not to the cultural budget of other U.S. City's but to Europe. \$3.6 billion euro is what France spent on

1 culture last year the majority of it going to Paris.
2 That's what we should be comparing to. We all know
3 that culture is at the roots of what makes this City
4 great and we know that not all of the roots are
5 getting the water they need to survive and thrive.
6 That takes funding which is why we are here today.

7
8 New Yorkers for Culture and Arts is asking that
9 funding for culture be held harmless at \$20 million.
10 We ask that \$10 million put in last year's budget be
11 baselined and that there be an additional investment
12 of \$10 million to go evenly to the CIG and program
13 groups delivering culture to citizens throughout the
14 city. It is a huge job and we do it on a shoestring.
15 WE ask that you support the groups that are doing so
16 much with so little. By supporting culture, you are
17 supporting better education, better aging, improved
18 mental health, stronger communities, and a city that
19 respects the dignity and humanity of every one of its
20 citizens. Thanks.

21 MARK ROSSIER: Thank you Chair Van Bramer and
22 members of the committee for calling this hearing and
23 for the really incredibly tireless work you do. I
24 mean, it is kind of inspiring being here and hearing
25 these testimonies and hearing your testimony.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

148

1
2 My name is Mark Rosier. I am the Director of
3 Grants at the New York Foundation for the Arts and I
4 am here today to ask that the Council baseline last
5 year's game changing \$10 million increase and provide
6 an additional \$10 million to be divided between the
7 program groups and the CIGs.

8 Support from the Department of Cultural Affairs
9 is vital to NYFA's operation and allows us to provide
10 critical support to artists, administrators, and the
11 arts communities. These funds support our fiscal
12 sponsorship program, which last year helped
13 individual artists and emerging organizations raise
14 over \$4 million, most of which is spent right here in
15 New York City. It allowed us to provide professional
16 development to support over 7,000 artists and
17 programming in Mandarin and Spanish. It supported
18 our website, which is used by over one million people
19 annually and posts over 700 jobs and opportunities
20 every month. Again, the vast majority of these jobs
21 are in New York City, thus creating employment
22 opportunities and tax revenue. Last year, with
23 DCLA's support, we provided in person workshops and
24 information sessions multiple times in all five
25

boroughs. And finally, DCLA allows us to provide cash grants to artists.

DCLA's support also provides us with organizational skill and stability which allows us to work with the city in other ways. For example, on February 28, working with the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, we were proud to announce the recipients of the first ever Made in New York Women's Film, TV and Theater Fund which awarded \$1.5 million to film media and theater projects with strong female and female identified perspectives. Sixty-three projects by those who identify as women were funded with 56 percent from artists of color and 10 percent for transgender and non-conforming and queer artists. New York is the first major city in the country to have a program of this sort.

This, of course, is no surprise since there is not other city in the country or the world for that matter, with the richness, diversity and excellence of New York's cultural community. It is a community which supports the city in so many ways and I hope the city will do its part by baselining last year's \$10 million and providing an additional \$10 million

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

150

this year. Thank you for all you do for our
spectacular city.

ROCKY BUCANO: Thank you Chairman Van Bramer for
allowing me to speak. My name is Rocky Bucano. I am
here to speak on behalf of the Universal Hip Hop
Museum.

The Universal Hip Hop Museum is a new project
that is going to break ground in December as part of
the Bronx Point Development Project in Mott Haven.
So, people ask me all the time why a Hip-Hop Museum.
Hip Hop is one of the most powerful artistic
revolutions to emerge from the United States. The
story of Hip Hops development and global rise offers
insight into the power of creative self-expression in
marginalized communities. This history and culture
deserve preservation and representation in a world
class museum setting.

The Universal Hip Hop Museum will be the first
major institution led by insiders of the culture to
celebrate and preserve the past, present and future
of hip hop designed for multi-generational audiences.

UHHM exhibits will present a rich history and
culture of hip hop through innovative immersive
multi-media learning environments. We've partnered

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

151

1 with MIT, we've partnered with google, we partnered
2 with Microsoft, we partnered with The National Museum
3 of African American culture, Cornell University and
4 other major institutions. So, we're bringing a large
5 diverse array of global education, partners in
6 technology, partners to bring this project to life.
7 We are seeking \$6 million to help us with
8 construction, new construction of the Corp and Shell
9 for the Museum. We know that this project is going
10 to be widely embraced by the community and the global
11 community to that matter and you would be proud to
12 know that your Queens Native son, LL Cool J sits on
13 our board. So, we represent all five boroughs, not
14 just in Bronx and we are proud to represent Hip Hop
15 on a global platform in the Bronx.
16

17 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. You ended
18 with the best thing. I love LL Cool J. Thank you
19 all for being here and I look forward to the fight
20 with all of you. Thank you so much.

21 ROCKY BUCANO: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: We have one more
23 cultural panel and then one last library panel. I
24 believe that a library panel, yes.
25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

152

So, I think I called before Ines Aslan is back from the New York Historical Society. Lisa Alpert, is Lisa Alpert still here? Yeap from Green-Wood Cemetery. Francine Garber-Cohen? Is Francine Garber-Cohen here from Regina Opera Company, I believe, and Katie Cox from Exploring the Metropolis.

And then we have Michael and Matthew Zadrozny, I think from Save NYPL to close it out. Do you want to start us off?

INES ASLAN: Hi, my name is Ines Aslan and I represent the New York Historical Society. We are very grateful partners of the City Council and the Department of Cultural Affairs. Just last week we were downstairs unveiling the new portraits of the women that now adorn the walls of City Hall, never ever done before. So, it's nice to be back. Thank you for having us.

As some of you know New York Historical Society was the first museum funded in New York 1804. The City had been burned to the ground a few times during the revolutionary war and a group of New Yorkers decided that they needed to get together and preserve the history of the city through the arts objects and documents at the time so we could tell the story of

the city and the country to future generations and
its been awhile. We host about 15 million objects in
our collections and we keep expanding our reach. We
serve over 200,000 public school students a year
through our educational programs and we offer all
this wide range of exhibitions that try to explain
and share with the citizens and students, what does
it mean to be an American? Ranging from **[inaudible**
4:37:30] the history of the Latino presence in the
Islands since 1507 when the first American got off
the boat. To Jewish Americans a couple of years ago
and most recently, Black Citizenship in the Age of
Jim Crow, which we just closed ten days ago. We
continue planning on exhibitions that help people
understand the wide range of cultures and people that
make this country and the city be the way it is and
we're moving forward. We couldn't have done that
without your support and so, that's why we are here
today to thank you and to also share our next steps.

We are planning our next project is the Academy
for American Democracy, we recognize that within our
student body, middle schoolers are some of the
weakest link in terms of when kids drop out of school
and by developing this program that we'll explain to

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

154

1 children the their teachers the history of democracy
2 from agent Greece till the founding of this country
3 and the current state of democracy now days will
4 engage them and develop a civic conscious and the
5 history of America inside them. So, that's coming
6 up. We thank you in advance for partnering with us
7 on that.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

10 INES ASLAN: And that's that.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great to see you again
12 and I apologize for mispronouncing your name.
13 Sometimes when we're reading them, they don't
14 translate, but Ines Aslan, right?

15 INES ASLAN: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay, so I got it right.
17 Thank you and good to see you again.

18 INES ASLAN: Good to see you.

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: The organization that
20 you work for as you know, I think very highly of and
21 you all are doing incredible work there. Thank you.

22 INES ASLAN: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Next.

24 LISA ALPERT: Good afternoon Chair Van Bramer and
25 Committee Council. My name is Lisa Alpert and I am

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

155

the Vice President of Developmental and Programming
at Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn.

Of all the cultural institutions you'll hear
about today, I feel pretty certain this is the first
and only time you'll hear about a cemetery. But this
cemetery is a National Historic Landmark. It is
Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn. It spans 478 acres
and borders Sunset Park, Windsor Terrace, Boro Park,
Kensington, Park Slope, Prospect Park South and
Ditmas Park. It is very big.

Green-Wood Cemetery has been in Brooklyn since
1838, and you know it is the final resting place for
thousands of New Yorkers but what you may not know is
that we present over 200 public programs, tours and
events every year. Last year alone, over 280,000
people came to Green-Wood to attend a program, to
visit a loved one, or just to stroll the historic
landscape and get away from it all.

I want to tell you about a couple of our favorite
programs to serve New York City youth, we have
developed a strong line up of programs. One is in
workforce development; we train young people from
low-income communities in masonry restoration for
jobs in restoring historic buildings. We run

environmental justice programs in Sunset Park which involves street trees in Green-Woods horticulture staff. We give school tours to over 4,000 elementary and middle school students a year and, on the arts, and cultural front, we host outdoor theater, film screenings, twilight tours, classical music and opera concerts in our catacombs. Contemporary art installations on the grounds and more. And between May and September our trolley tours always sell out, including our annual Gay Green-Wood tour, which highlights the accomplishments of the many of many LGBTQ notables at the Cemetery.

At Green-Wood, we have a bold vision and it is to establish Green-Wood Cemetery as a major cultural institution and educational institution in New York City within ten years. And we are well on our way.

Okay, why am I here? Green-Wood is a giant greenspace in the middle of Brooklyn. It is a huge resource to the community, and we want to serve more New Yorkers with public programs and serve more tourists and people coming to New York for cultural opportunities. Our planned education and Welcome Center are the key. It is a capital project we want to bring go your attention. It is directly across

the street from Green-Wood's main entrance. It is a \$34 million budget. One third of the funding will come from private philanthropy and one third will come from the Cemetery itself, and we are targeting city and state funding for the last third.

Our Fiscal 2020 capital ask of the Brooklyn Delegation is \$1 million.

Green-Wood has been in Brooklyn for 181 years, but it is an entirely new cultural asset and in a part of the borough that is culturally, significantly underserved.

We hope very much to work with the City Council on this important initiative and I am happy to answer any questions about cemetery's or live and death, or anything you want to talk about, or even our capital project. Thank you very much for your time.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. It sounds like I could ask you a lot of different question.

LISA ALPERT: Many topics, yes.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, is it the Weir Greenhouse.

LISA ALPERT: The Weir Greenhouse, right.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: That is beautiful.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

158

LISA ALPERT: It is beautiful. It was built in 1895 and is a City Landmark. We have restored it faithfully and very arduously. It's beautiful and old and gorgeous but its 1,600 square feet. So, the larger building behind it will then offer the indoor space that we need. As a cultural institution we are a very, very large outdoor space but we really need some indoor space to continue our programming year around.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: That's great and I love what you're doing. Obviously, we have some cemetery's in Queens that are also programming in the way that you are.

So, I heard you say there's an LGBT. So, I find that fascinating because obviously a lot of the folks who are buried in Green-Wood Cemetery died at a time when people weren't exactly coming out or declaring themselves as LGBT activists, so who is doing the research to come up with that list and what does it look like now. I would find that fascinating.

LISA ALPERT: Yeah, it is really interesting. I mean, there are 570,000 people buried there and statistically there might be about 57,000 or more LGBTQ permanent residents as we call them. So, we do

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

159

work with historians in our own staff right now on
that list. Our Leonard Bernstein, Jean-Michel
Basquiat, Fred Ebb, 19 Century Violet Oakley, Emma
Stebbins who is the sculpture of the Bethesda
Fountain in Central Park and more that I'm not
thinking about right now but it's a long list and
growing as we continue to do more research through
our own archival materials. And interestingly, for
the LGBTQ community, we do a number of programs
through the Cemetery itself including Deaf and Dying
in LGBTQ Community, which has been a very popular
program that we offer for free twice a year.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: That's really
interesting. Thank you.

LISA ALPERT: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Next, Regina Opera
Company.

FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN: Yeah, I had my Regina
Opera shirt on.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Need the red light.

FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN: Thank you. I am Fran
Garber-Cohen from Regina Opera Company, President and
Producer.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

160

For 49 years, Regina Opera has offered year-round, fully-staged operas and ticketed and free concerts in Southwest Brooklyn.

Regina Opera performance are places where thousands of Brooklyn residents, many of them retirees, come to meet their friends, stimulating their minds and getting them out of the house. Attending our performances distracts them from their troubles. We have been told that our performances are also very high quality, which is why we pack them in like little sardines in our theater.

We provide affordable entertainment for audiences who might not otherwise attend live performances. Some are on fixed incomes and cannot afford the tickets of the Major Opera house. Some can't travel to Manhattan. Others are intimidated by the Major opera houses or have not been exposed to opera previously. The venues in which we perform are all handicap accessible.

Regina Opera offers matinee performances, reducing travel after dark. The response of the audience is overwhelming. 4000 people will be attending performances during Fiscal Year 2019, taking advantage of low cost and free tickets, the

1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND 161
2 INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

3 opera tickets are anywhere between \$20 and \$25. \$15
4 for Concerts and much less for students including
5 free admission.

6 Regina Opera is unique in Brooklyn. Many music
7 schools and other groups present operas or concerts
8 in Brooklyn, but Regina Opera is the only group
9 presenting professional level, fully staged operas
10 and operatic concerts year-round and has been doing
11 it for 49 years.

12 Our Company is well known in the music world for
13 providing training and opportunities for musical
14 artists of all backgrounds and we reflect the make up
15 of New York City. Regina Opera helps the entire
16 community. The performances add to the cultural
17 vitality which serves as a magnet for prospective
18 residents and businesses. Most of our performances
19 are in Sunset Park, which of course, is an
20 underserved area. We directly effect the economy,
21 this locality by employing local residence,
22 purchasing local goods, we even rent a storage unit
23 right near our theater in Sunset Park. Our
24 performance and audience members frequently shop and
25 eat in this area.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

162

So, we join everybody else in thanking the Council Members who support us. Mr. Menchaca and Mr. Brannan and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and Brooklyn Arts Council as well as other private and public organizations and we request that the funding for 2020 Fiscal Year be increased by \$20 million divided among the other recipients of the New York City Council funding. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And last on this panel, Exploring the Metropolis.

KATIE COX: Hi, good afternoon. My name is Katie Cox. I am a flutist, a music educator and a teaching artist for Little Orchestra Society. I am also the Program Manager for Exploring the Metropolis ETM. I am here representing ETM, an organization whose mission I care about deeply, not only as its program manager but as a musician myself.

Since 1982 ETM has focused on solving the workspace needs of New York City's performing artists. We currently administer the ETM Con Edison Composer Residencies and the Choreographer plus Composer Residency in partnership with Jamaica Center for Art and Learning.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

163

In the last decade, our residency program has provided more than 1 million worth of no-cost rehearsal space and cash awards to New York City artists. We have supported 98 composers, choreographers, and performing artists with free space, provided more than 40,000 hours of free rehearsal space. Supported 80 free public programs for thousand of New Yorkers and supported the creation, development and completion of 79 new works for music and dance.

For the fiscal year 2020, we ask that consideration be given additional funding for both the CIG and our program group partners. We ask that the \$10 million total that Culture has received be baselined inclusive of the \$2.25 million that was baselined for CIGs in the budget last year.

We request that the additional \$10 million plus any enhanced cultural funding that can be allocated in Fiscal Year 2020 be divided evenly between the CIG and our program group partners. So that we continue to provide needs, programs and services to New Yorkers in all five boroughs.

Thank you, Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer and the Cultural Affairs Committee, for the opportunity

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

164

to testify today and for your support of the cultural
community.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much. I
appreciate you coming by. This is your first time
testifying.

KATIE COX: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: You did a great job and
I see your fellow colleague from ATM back there
videotaping. It will be going viral on Instagram and
Facebook later. So, thank you all of you for being
here and for testifying at this hearing. Last but
not least, we have Michael White and Matthew Zadrozny
to close it out on behalf of libraries.

Alright, who wants to go first? Matthew has been
waiting longer.

MATTHEW ZADROZNY: Mr. Chairman good afternoon.
My name is Matthew Zadrozny and I am a data scientist
and a member of the Committee to Save the New York
Public Library, also known as SaveNYPL.org. I've
used the NYPL for 25 years. I donate money to the
library through its Young Lions program and I attend
board meetings as a member of the public.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

165

Earlier today you heard Tony Marx, NYPL's president, request more money for longer hours. I support this, but there's more to the story.

The leadership of NYPL wants longer hours for branch libraries. However, they have resisted longer hours at NYPL's Central Research Library at 42nd and 5th Avenue. For 60 years after its founding, the main library was open around 87 hours per week. Now, it I open only 56. Most days today included, the main library closes at 6pm, before working New Yorkers can get there. On Sunday's the library is only open for four hours.

Historically, longer or later hours allowed New Yorkers to come after work and stay till 9 or 10 in the evening, researching, studying and bettering their lives. NYPL reduced hours in the 70's due to a budget crisis. Now the library's endowment is at a record high of more than \$1 billion. The obstacle is not money but leadership's addiction to corporate events and weddings.

SaveNYPL has been protesting this. We have collected some 2,000 signatures from New Yorkers who need the main library to be open late. Over the library entrance are the words: The City of New York

has erected this building for the free use of all the people." Closing the library for private events during prime time is de facto privatization and unbecoming of the great city.

What is more important? Cocktail parties for the connected? Or a quiet space for student, scholars, startup founders, and job seekers?

The City Council should tell NYPL's leadership that the best way to serve the public is not through expensive and unnecessary capital projects. Instead, keep the central library and all libraries open longer, serve readers, not cocktails. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much Matthew for the testimony and I will take a look at that and I have not seen this particular view echoed, that the reason that the library is not more evenings in particular is for some of their earned income events or other events, but I will talk to Tony Marx about that but I appreciate your perspective and coming here today.

MATTHEW ZADROZNY: Thank you Mr. Chairman and thank you for getting my last name earlier. That doesn't happen very often.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

167

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, I didn't get many
right today, so I'll take the hard one that I got but
I have a very difficult last name that often gets
mispronounced including today, but that's okay.

Michael, last but not least.

MICHAEL WHITE: Michael White, Citizens Defending
Libraries. I support and endorse everything that
Matthew just said.

These are images of Karl Lagerfeld's personal
library, 300,000 books. Those 300,000 books are just
a few books shy a number from the number that's being
talked about as the number of books that will be in
the Reduced Mid-Manhattan Library.

That's not the way it should be. The mid-
Manhattan Library was designed to hold over 700,000
books. We are talking about it being consolidated
with the SIBL Library which over one million books
are missing. And then all of the Donnell Library's
hundreds of thousands of books.

He was something of a polymath, but these
represent his personal interests, the Mid-Manhattan
Library, the main circulating library for all New
Yorkers should represent the interests of all of the
New Yorkers.

These are picture of the empty shelves of the Flatbush Library. These were taken the day that the Brooklyn Public Library trustees held a trustees meeting above these empty shelves quite oblivious to them and they had a sort of goofy meeting about how to rearrange furniture in shrunken libraries so you wouldn't notice that they didn't have any space. I heard Linda Johnson today talk about how the replacement Brooklyn Heights Library is going to be a bigger, better, configured library. That's not true. It's going to be 40 percent of the previous library. It will be not an educational library, not a business library, not a career library, not a federal depository library. It won't have the same books and in terms of configuration, it will be configured as an afterthought to what the developer wanted for his luxury project. Now, similarly Iris Weinshall said that the reason to sell off the Inwood Library was because of its poor configuration but when they assembled the developers to bid on the property, they said that configuration didn't matter. So, what you're being told is not true and we are eliminating books and people like Karl Lagerfeld who have the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

169

privilege to own what's valuable, own more books than
we are affording the New Yorkers of this city.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you for also
challenging my vision here.

MICHAEL WHITE: I'd like to put it up here
because it's always so impressive when the library
Administrators come in and their able to do their big
presentations and I'd love it if for the future we
can prearrange to do some great shows that everyone
could see.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: We will talk to you
about that afterwards, but I think I got the just of
it.

MICHAEL WHITE: It is also up on Citizens
Defending Libraries.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, it looks like Karl
Lagerfeld had a lot of books. So, I am willing to
stipulate that. And I appreciate your viewpoint and
the things that you have raised here at this
Committee meeting and others and the Queens Library
skates today. So, only NYPL and BPL were mentioned
here today by this particular panel. So, let me just
say thank you to both of you for caring about
libraries as much as you do and for coming to well,

1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
2 INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

170

3 Michael always comes to our hearings but Matthew,
4 maybe this is your first. Is this your first?

5 MATTHEW ZADROZNY: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, maybe we will see
7 your more regularly like we do Michael, but I
8 appreciate that you come from a place of loving
9 libraries and wanting libraries to be the best that
10 they can be. So, thank you both very, very much for
11 being here and with that hour, committee is
12 adjourned. [GAVEL].
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

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 April 1, 2018