



New York City Council Parks and Recreation Committee Hearing

Int. 1083-A: Local Representation on Park Conservancies December 8, 2009

New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P) is the independent organization dedicated to ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to a world class park system.

Transparency and Community Involvement

We applaud this proposed legislation for working to expand the levels of accountability and transparency in the management of our public parks. As evidenced by recent issues throughout the city, more transparency is needed in the governance of our parks.

Int. 1083-A attempts to increase local accountability by mandating that at least one individual who resides or whose place of business is within each Council District in which a park is located or abuts must be a voting member of the board of directors of the respective park conservancy. We support this principle and feel that community involvement and representation is essential towards improving the efficiency, equity and efficacy of public-private partnerships in parks.

Recommendations

We have several recommendations regarding the most recent version of the legislation. The bill would only affect conservancies that have written agreements with the City and that are responsible for hiring the majority of the full-time staff operating the park. Few groups fall within both of these categories. According to the 2007 Citizens Budget Commission report commissioned by New Yorkers for Parks, *Making the Most of Our Parks*, only ten of the 40-plus conservancies in the City have written contracts, and

fewer than this hire the majority of their full-time staff. We believe there could be value to increasing the number of conservancies that are held accountable to this legislation and this should be explored further.

Finally, we commend the inclusion of joint consultation between Council Members and the Parks Department to determine the local representative of the conservancy; however we recommend that the Community Board also be included in this process. In addition, we would like clarification on how "rotating" of local representatives would take place when more than two Council Districts represent the park. Many large parks with conservancies abut multiple Council Districts that have widely varying demographics, and it is important to ensure that all groups are fairly represented.

Conclusion

While some public-private partnerships make it a priority to include community members, broader legislation is needed. Community involvement is too often seen as an afterthought or even a barrier in many parks operations. This bill allows for members of the local community to take an active role in the oversight of their public park. Local leadership and participation in the decision-making process is vital towards increasing transparency, stewardship, and community ownership in public parks.

We support Int. 1083-A to improve transparency and the public process in park operations throughout NYC.

Thank you.