

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND
RECREATION

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March 12, 2021
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HELD AT: Remote Hearing, Virtual Room 1

B E F O R E: Peter A. Koo
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Peter A. Koo
Joseph C. Borelli
Justin L. Brannan
Darma V. Diaz
James F. Gennaro
Mark Gjonaj
Robert F. Holden
Mark Levine
Francisco P. Moya
Kevin C. Riley
Carlina Rivera
Eric A. Ulrich
Jimmy Van Bramer
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.

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

Mitchell Silver
Commissioner
Department of Parks and Recreation

Liam Kavanagh
First Deputy Commissioner
Department of Parks and Recreation

Therese Braddick
Deputy Commissioner for Capital Projects
Department of Parks and Recreation

Margaret Nelson
Deputy Commissioner Urban Park Service
and Public Programs
Department of Parks and Recreation

Joy Wang
Deputy Commissioner for Administration
Department of Parks and Recreation

David Stark
Assistant Commissioner for Budget and
Fiscal Management
Department of Parks and Recreation

Sam Biederman
Assistant Commissioner for Community
Outreach and Partnership Development

Matt Drury
Director of Government Relations

Adam Ganser

Heather Lubov

Lynn Kelly

Dilcy Benn

Joe Puleo

Marlena Giga

Carter Strickland

Christina Taylor

Carlos Castell Croke

Dan Clay

Joanna Altman Smith

Emily Maxwell

Anna Boatwright

Sarah Charlop-Powers

Mike Rezny

Amy Harrison Thogmartin

Caroline Soussloff

Jennifer Wainwright

Christine Datz-Romero

Allie Ryan

Sarah Williams

Fay Hill

Jordan Heiden

Mike Schnall

Angel Hernandez

Alexandra Unthank

Scott Daly

Stacy Papas

Caroline Parker

Kimberley Maier

Nilka Martel

Robert Price

Anthony Font

Wendy Page

Roxanne Delgado

1
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Sergeants, will you
3 start your recordings:

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: PC recording started.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Cloud is up.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Backup is rolling.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Sergeant
8 Kotowski, you may start with the opening.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS KOTOWSKI: Good morning
10 and welcome to today's remote New York City Council
11 Hearing of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. At
12 this time would council staff please turn on their
13 video. Please place electronic devices on vibrate or
14 silent. If you wish to submit testimony you may do
15 so at testimony@council.nyc.gov. That is
16 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you. Chair, we are
17 ready to begin.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Thank you
19 for joining our virtual hearing today before the
20 council's Committee on Parks and Recreation. I would
21 like to acknowledge my fellow council members who are
22 present, Council Member Brannan, Council Member Darma
23 Diaz, Council Member Gjonaj, Council Member Riley,
24 Council Member Rivera, Council Member Van Bramer, ah,
25 Council Member Holden, and a few others may be

1 joining later. Good morning, and welcome to the
2 Parks and Recreation Committee hearing on the fiscal
3 2022 preliminary budget and the fiscal 2021
4 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report for the
5 Department of Parks and Recreation. My name is Peter
6 Koo. I'm the chair of the Parks and Recreation
7 Committee. Today we will hear testimony from the
8 Department of Parks and Recreation on its expense and
9 capital budgets for fiscal 2022. The department's
10 proposed fiscal 22 expense budget totals 532.7
11 million dollars. This is 29.6 million dollars higher
12 than the fiscal year 2021 adopted budget. In total,
13 the proposed fiscal 2022 expense budget represents a
14 little more than half of 1% of the entire proposed
15 city budget of 9.23 billion dollars. The
16 department's proposed capital budget for fiscal 2022
17 through 2025 totals 2.9 billion dollars, which
18 represents approximately 5.4% of the city's total
19 capital budget for 2022 to 2025. It has been exactly
20 a year since our last preliminary budget hearing and
21 exactly a year since the council's last in-person
22 hearing. We adopted the fiscal 2021 budget in the
23 middle of a pandemic that has ravaged our city and
24 has permanently changed our way of life. Even at
25

1 this moment we are still not sure if or when we can
2 get together in the same room without worrying about
3 social distancing. As a result of the pandemic we
4 have witnessed dramatic increases in usage of our
5 parts and the number of visitors at our parks. These
6 increases have required the Parks Department and its
7 volunteers to intensify efforts to maintain our
8 city's parks. Unfortunately, these increases are
9 also helping, unfortunately these increases are also
10 happening despite the fact that the department's
11 fiscal 2021 adopted budget was significantly reduced
12 by the COVID-19-related budget cuts. The main result
13 of these cuts was the loss of almost 2000 seasonal
14 maintenance and operation workers. The loss of
15 workers [inaudible] contributing to the growing
16 sanitation and maintenance problems across New York
17 City's green spaces. We saw unmowed lawns, trash
18 piles, and cordoned-off spaces across our park
19 system. As we begin the fiscal 2022 budget process
20 we must keep in mind that in the fiscal 2021 adopted
21 budget the administration did not include funding 5
22 million dollars for our parks, despite the urging of
23 the council. Last year the council successfully
24 negotiated for the administration for the inclusion
25

1 of 10 million dollars to save the jobs of 150
2 maintenance workers in the fiscal 2021 adopted
3 budget. However, this finding was not baselined and
4 therefore not included in the fiscal 2022 preliminary
5 budget plan. In addition, despite all the
6 challenging factors the council continued its
7 investment in parks with an allocation of 1.8 million
8 dollars for the Parks Equity Initiative in fiscal
9 2021. However, the initiative saw a 65% cut compared
10 to the fiscal 2020 adopted budget allocation.

11 Although it is understandable that the current budget
12 priorities heavily focus on combatting the pandemic,
13 we must not forget the parks are critical
14 infrastructure. They are essential to our city's
15 recovery efforts. During the past year our parks
16 provided a [inaudible] New York City apartments for a
17 place to enjoy a walk and safely visit friends and
18 families, and they will continue to be essential to
19 keep our residents' physical and mental health in
20 balance. As the parks role, "NYC parks have become
21 people's [inaudible]." As we head into warmer
22 weather we must remember that during long pandemic
23 times parks are the key to healthy communities. Our
24 city's resiliency and fight against climate change
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1
2 and are drivers of economic growth. Investing in our
3 parks is investing in our residents and our city's
4 recovery. Thank you to my committee staff,
5 especially Monica and Cheema of the financial
6 division, Chris and Patrick of the legislative
7 division, and my own staff. We will now hear from
8 the Commissioner Silver of Parks and Recreation. But
9 before we hear the commissioner I would also like to
10 acknowledge, ah, my colleagues who are present. I
11 always acknowledge them. Are there any more? Later
12 I will acknowledge them all. And now with the
13 committee counsel please swear in the commissioner
14 and his team.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair Koo.
16 I'm Kris Sartori, senior counsel to the Committee on
17 Parks and Recreation, and I'll be moderating this
18 hearing. Before we begin, I'd like to remind
19 everyone that you will be on mute until you are
20 called on to testify, at which point you will be
21 unmuted by the host. During the hearing I'll be
22 calling on panelists to testify. Please listen for
23 your name to be called. Please listen for your name
24 to be called as I will periodically be announcing who
25 the next panelists will be. We will first be hearing

1 testimony from the administration, followed by
2 testimony from members of the public. During the
3 hearing if council members would like to ask a
4 question of the administration or of a specific
5 panelist, please use the Zoom hand raise function and
6 I will call on you in order. We will be limiting
7 council member questions to five minutes, which
8 includes the time it takes to answer those questions.
9 For members of the public, we will be limiting
10 speaking time to two minutes in order to accommodate
11 all who wish to speak today. Once you are called on
12 to testify please begin by stating your name and the
13 organization you represent, if any. We will now call
14 on representatives of the administration to testify.
15 Appearing for the Department of Parks and Recreation
16 will be Mitchell Silver, commissioner of the
17 department, Liam Kavanagh, first deputy commissioner,
18 Therese Braddick, deputy commissioner for capital
19 projects, Margaret Nelson, deputy commissioner urban
20 park service and public programs, Joy Wang, deputy
21 commissioner for administration, David Stark,
22 assistant commissioner for budget and fiscal
23 management, Sam Biederman, assistant commissioner for
24 community outreach and partnership development, and
25

2 Matt Drury, director government relations. At this
3 time I will administer the affirmation to each
4 representative of the administration. I will call on
5 you individually for a response. So at this time
6 please raise your right hands. Do you affirm to tell
7 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth
8 before this committee and to respond honestly to
9 council member questions? Commissioner Silver.

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: First Deputy
12 Commissioner Kavanagh?

13 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Deputy Commissioner
15 Nelson.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: I do.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ah, Deputy
18 Commissioner Wang. Commissioner Wang [inaudible].

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WANG: I do.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Assistant
21 Commissioner Stark?

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER STARK: I do.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WANG: Can you hear
24 me now? I, I do.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes, we hear you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes. Assistant
3 Commissioner Biederman?

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ah, Commissioner
6 Braddick?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: I do.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And Director Drury?
9 Is Director Drury there? I [inaudible]. We see him,
10 just give us one second with the [inaudible].

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: You can say it from
12 speaker.

13 DIRECTOR DRURY: I do.

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: OK.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. So at
16 this time I will invite Commissioner Mitchell Silver
17 to please present his testimony.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you. Um,
19 good morning Chair Koo and members of the Parks
20 Committee and other members of the council. I am
21 Mitchell Silver, commissioner of the New York City
22 Department of Parks and Recreation, and I am joined
23 virtually here today by a number of my senior staff.
24 As you aware, New York City Parks have a
25 responsibility as a stewardship of over 30,000 acres

1 of green and open space, encompassing 5000 individual
2 properties, ranging from playgrounds and beaches to
3 community gardens and natural areas. Thank you for
4 allowing me the opportunity to discuss the agency's
5 preliminary budget for fiscal year 2022 and to
6 provide an overview of our agency's recent efforts
7 and initiatives in building and maintaining our
8 agency's green and open spaces during a year that was
9 incredibly difficult and challenging for the agency
10 and for all New Yorkers. In fact, it was almost
11 precisely a year ago today that I appeared before
12 this committee in council chambers to discuss last
13 year's preliminary budget in what came to be the last
14 in-person hearing held by the City Council, ah,
15 before the COVID lockdown. As I testified at the
16 time, we were aware of the impending concerns and
17 working closely with Department of Health and to
18 prepare for a potential pandemic. But no one could
19 have imagined how transformative 2020 would prove to
20 be in ways both horrifying as well as uplifting. We
21 truly live in a completely different world than we
22 did a year ago. Through the terrible toll of lives
23 lost and families shattered during COVID, the pain of
24 the resulting economic crisis, and the long overdue
25

1 dialogue on systemic racism sparked by the Black
2 Lives Matter movement and the tragic deaths of George
3 Floyd and countless other black men and women.
4 Through it all, one dynamic has remained constantly
5 and increasingly clear. Our city parks and open
6 spaces are critical infrastructure that is absolutely
7 vital to New Yorkers. We've always prided ourselves
8 on being an agency of fun, health, and happiness.
9 But we learned even more that this past year just how
10 much parks play a central role in improving the well-
11 being of the city's residents. Anyone visiting one
12 of our parks during the last 12 months could see how
13 our city's residents came to rely on these
14 sanctuaries of sanity for all the physical, mental,
15 and emotional benefits they provide, especially as
16 alternatives for relaxation and recreation became
17 increasingly rare. Travel to the other parts of the
18 country was practically impossible. Concert halls,
19 movie theaters shuttered, and the lights on Broadway
20 sadly remain dark, but our city's parks stayed open
21 and avail to New Yorkers in their greatest hour of
22 need. We all owe a huge debt of gratitude to our
23 Parks employees, especially our front-line employees
24 in the field who've worked extraordinarily hard in a
25

1 very challenging environment to keep our properties
2 safe and to preserve exceptional amenities that
3 people have come to expect from our park system. The
4 pandemic brought about the need for many difficult
5 decisions as COVID-19 continued to spread and our
6 understanding of the disease itself and its impact on
7 the city's fiscal position continued to evolve.

8 Working in coordination with other city entities, we
9 had to close our recreation centers and some of our
10 smallest parks and playgrounds, cancel programs for
11 athletic sports and large public programs, and pause
12 our capital reconstruction projects. But our agency
13 remains strong and resilient and we creatively
14 reassigned staff and repurposed several of our
15 properties as part of the city's response to this
16 crisis. Our parks enforcement patrol officers and
17 Urban Park Rangers help ensure that the park-goers
18 could relax and enjoy our park spaces in a safe
19 manner. And the creation of our Parks Social
20 Distance Ambassadors program, made possible largely
21 with the redeployment of our public program staff,
22 was key keeping park visitors safe. I am proud to
23 note that our agency staff through a variety of
24 efforts and initiatives distributed close to 8
25

1 million face coverings to the public free of cost.

2 Several of our recreation centers became food
3 distribution sites, delivering over 42 million meals
4 to our most vulnerable New Yorkers, Central Park and
5 Flushing Meadows Corona Park, were sites of temporary
6 emergency field hospitals, providing more capacity
7 for the healthcare system that was heavily taxed in
8 the early weeks of the pandemic, and COVID testing
9 sites have been established at five parks

10 [inaudible]. Our Brooklyn borough operation staff
11 even took the initiative and created six-foot red
12 signs that help remind park-goers to maintain a
13 social distance, which became an iconic emblem
14 modeled all over the globe. But our participation in
15 the city's effort to slow the spread of COVID did not
16 prevent us from focusing on our core mission, and as
17 our work continued to maintain and care for our parks
18 and provide [inaudible] opportunities both virtually
19 and in the field. For those who were not able to go
20 out into our parks, even for a brief visit, we
21 created Parks at Home, which featured virtual content
22 on our website and social platforms serving the young
23 and the young at heart, including live park tours,
24 meditation, fitness clinics, art classes, and other
25

1 fun activities, including New York City Parks' very
2 own Spotify channel, where we were able to celebrate
3 the connection between green spaces and music with
4 several specially curated playlists. Out in our
5 parks we continue to maximize our resources and work
6 smarter to provide the amenities and level of service
7 that New Yorkers have come to expect. In the summer
8 and fall our public programs and recreation, ah,
9 division teams, including the Urban Park Rangers,
10 offered a diverse variety of close to 2000 socially
11 distant outdoor programs, including nature,
12 education, arts, photography, media education,
13 crafts, fitness, and sports. A vast majority were
14 offered in 27 neighborhoods identified by the city's
15 COVID Racial Inclusion and Equity Task Force. Our
16 arts and antiquities division was able to repair and
17 clean close to 600 monuments and offer 48 temporary
18 art exhibitions for the public to enjoy throughout
19 the city. Our Partnership with Parks division, a
20 joint effort with the City Parks Foundation,
21 coordinated the participation of 7000 volunteers in
22 hundreds of safety-organized service projects, many
23 at the COVID relief priority sites. To keep our
24 local community gardens healthy and thriving during
25

1 COVID our GreenThumb distributed, ah, about, I'm
2 sorry, 110,000 free plants and over 2000 cubic yards
3 of free topsoil to our community garden groups and
4 facilitated garden renovations and the construction
5 of new raised planting beds for these unique and
6 beloved community sites. Though we were only able to
7 open a portion of outdoor pools last summer due to
8 safety concerns, our marketing and operations teams
9 worked closely together to add two new of our
10 creative and fun Cool Pools NYC Initiative, which has
11 transformed several of our outdoor pools in
12 underserved neighborhoods and to revitalize resort-
13 quality destinations that are more vibrant and
14 welcoming. Our Natural Resource Group in
15 collaboration with the Natural Areas Conservancy
16 completed and published our Wetlands Management
17 Framework and delivered long-awaited improvement and
18 restoration projects, including the Putnam Greenway
19 in Van Cortlandt Park. And as soon as we're
20 authorized to bring our capital projects back online
21 our Capital Division continued to get results,
22 completing long-awaited projects, such as the
23 beautiful renovation of Luther Gullick Park in
24 Manhattan, our Parks Without Borders project in
25

1 Prospect Park in Brooklyn, which created a new
2 entrance for the community on the eastern edge of the
3 park, and phase one of our Anchor Parks project in
4 St. Mary's Park in the Bronx, helping make an old
5 park new again. All of this was possible because we
6 prioritized safety and the well-being of our
7 incredible Parks employees. Throughout the COVID-19
8 crisis we have provided our staff with a variety of
9 resources so they can tend to their work in a safe
10 manner. In addition to following the city and state
11 health directives, we provided the necessary personal
12 protective equipment, implemented flexible and
13 staggered scheduling for essential workers, adapted
14 our vehicle policy to promote social distancing,
15 introduced a robust cleaning protocol for our
16 facilities, and continued to provide a steady stream
17 of up-to-date information for all employees with
18 broadcast emails regarding COVID testing and other
19 resources to benefit their physical and mental well-
20 being. In May of 2020 we led an effort to publicize
21 Going Green for Parkies, a global effort to thank our
22 park workers as iconic buildings across the country
23 and the world were lit green in tribute to essential
24 park workers. This tribute at Empire State Building,
25

1 Washington Square Arch, and other buildings across
2 the city, country, and world, serve as an incredible
3 acknowledgement and thanks for all of their hard work
4 and, of course, we're keeping our employees informed
5 about the important COVID vaccinations and working
6 very closely with health authorities as state and
7 local guidance evolves and more and more of our
8 employees become eligible for the vaccine. Alongside
9 the emergence of COVID pandemic, the economic crisis
10 our society is dealing with a fundamental crisis of
11 conscience as the nations faces a reckoning with
12 centuries of institutional racism, inequity, and
13 [inaudible]. Our city parks were major locations for
14 Black Lives Matter protests, other free speech
15 gathering, gatherings, and we as an agency also
16 contending with these dynamics head on. Our public
17 facing efforts included the creation of Juneteenth
18 Grove in Cadman Plaza and the renamings of several
19 park properties with prominent persons in the black
20 community. Though we have long prided ourselves on a
21 record of M/WBE inclusion and engagement, we are
22 redoubling our efforts to create even more business
23 opportunities for M/WBE firms to reflect and honor
24 the diversity of our city. In light of these
25

1
2 fundamental challenges we also have to take a look
3 inward as an agency. And I was proud to elevate our
4 equal opportunity officer position to an assistant
5 commissioner level back in 2015, the first New York
6 City agency to do so, to ensure that our dedication
7 to equity and fairness includes our internal hiring
8 and promotion practices. During the summer we
9 launched Reflections On, an internal agency forum
10 encouraging open discourse and candid dialogue about
11 racial and social issues impacting many Parkies.
12 Since its inception we have successfully engaged in
13 meaningful and pointed staff discussions in an effort
14 to sustain a safer, inclusive, and equitable work
15 environment. In the spirit of openness and unity we
16 look toward to 2021 as a city, nation, and world
17 slowly heals and recovers from this crisis. In
18 accordance with state and city guidance we are
19 increasingly able to permit organized league sports
20 and special events. All park capital projects that
21 have been temporarily placed on hold have been
22 granted permission to officially move forward. Given
23 the large volume of projects that are coming back
24 online, we are carefully strategizing how to proceed
25 to avoid overwhelming oversight agencies, flooding

1 the construction market, and affecting our active
2 portfolio. Many of you recall that Parks faced an
3 incredibly difficult staffing situation last spring
4 and summer in light of the city's fiscal challenges,
5 including a suspension of our seasonal staffing plan.
6 We do expect to have an increase in seasonal staffing
7 and other resources compared to last year. But this
8 upcoming season will still be challenging, warmer
9 weather, lower rates of COVID spread, and increased
10 public confidence in vaccines will lead to even more
11 people leaving their homes and seeking to return to
12 normalcy. Since many other aspects of life around
13 the city will be phased in slowly, including our
14 recreational outlets, we expect parks usage will
15 again surge greatly in the upcoming months, leading
16 to a similar litter and maintenance challenges as
17 last year. Our incredible staff will work their
18 hardest, but our resources are finite, so we need all
19 New Yorkers to step up and do their part to keep our
20 shared public spaces in the best condition possible.
21 We will be relaunching the Anti-Litter Public
22 Education Campaign we successfully executed last
23 summer. And we hope the council will join us in
24 educating New Yorkers as well as recruiting
25

1 volunteers to help on our Monday morning [inaudible]
2 and serve as litter ambassadors at targeted sites, at
3 targeted sites during the periods of peak usage.
4

5 Turning to specific topic of this hearing, this
6 year's preliminary budget remains relatively cautious
7 in light of the ongoing economic impacts faced by the
8 city. However, it still gives our agency the
9 resources we need to continue getting the job done.

10 The agency's expense budget includes 532.7 million in
11 mayoral funding this year for operational needs, a
12 significant increase over last year's adopted budget.

13 The preliminary 10-year capital plan, including the
14 current fiscal year, provides a total capital budget
15 of 5.67 billion, reflecting the importance of keeping
16 our portfolio in a state of good repair. Last year
17 has been a difficult one for all of us and I'm
18 extremely proud of the work we've done and grateful
19 for the solace and comfort that parks have provided
20 New Yorkers in the face of so much pain and loss.

21 When New Yorkers need room to breathe, literally and
22 figuratively, for their physical, mental, and
23 emotional well-being, our parks were there for them,
24 providing Frederick Law Olmstead's belief that parks
25 truly are the lungs of the city. That is why I'm

1
2 exceptionally honored when the American Planning
3 Association awarded us 2020 National Planning
4 Excellence Award for advancing diversity and social
5 change to the agency for its Community Parks
6 Initiative. And when the World Urban Parks
7 Organization also honored the New York City park
8 system with the 2020 Legacy Award. Though I expect
9 to appear before council at least one more time, I
10 want to thank you for the council's support of great
11 parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers during my
12 tenure. I also want to thank Mayor de Blasio for the
13 granting me the privilege to transform this agency
14 and our parks system for making it more equitable,
15 inclusive, and resilient. I am grateful to have
16 worked with the amazing New York City Parks
17 leadership as well as the dedicated Parks staff
18 who've helped keep our parks safe, clean, and
19 accessible, especially through a global pandemic.
20 Serving Parks Commissioner has been the highest honor
21 of my career. New York City Parks looks forward to
22 continuing to work alongside of City Council to
23 create a bright, green future with more equitable and
24 inclusive parks system. We are now happy to answer
25 your question. Thank you.

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 26
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you,
3 Commissioner. I will now turn it over to Chair Koo
4 for his questions.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Kris. Thank
6 you, Commissioner, for your testimony, yeah, and I
7 want to thank you on behalf of the, the Parks
8 Committee. Ah, thank you for your outstanding
9 service to the citizens of New York. Um, I have some
10 questions. The fiscal 2021 adopted budget cuts that
11 came into effect on July 1, 2020, significantly
12 affected Parks operation. As a result of the cuts,
13 1700 seasonal staff were not hired and maintenance
14 hours reduced by roughly 25,000 hours per week. The
15 cumulative effect was increase in the number of 311
16 Parks sanitation complaints and lack of evening hours
17 or weekend coverage despite the incredible increase
18 in park usage, especially in the evenings and
19 weekends. The pandemic is not yet over and the
20 council is highly concerned about the condition of
21 our parks in the nearest future. So, commissioner,
22 the pandemic is not over yet and you know the council
23 is really concerned about the condition of our parks
24 both now and in the future. So I must ask you, will
25 the department have sufficient maintenance workers

1
2 for this coming spring season to ensure a safe and
3 clean environment for all parks?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Council Member Koo,
5 Thank you for your question. Ah, the answer is yes.
6 If you recall, ah, we were in an economic crisis, ah,
7 last year. Ah, a lot of the one-shots were cut. Ah,
8 we did not, we were not able to advance our seasonal
9 plan, and your statement is correct. In fact it was
10 over 32,000 hours, ah, of working in parks that we
11 lost each week, so it was quite significant. The
12 good news is the seasonal plan has now been restored,
13 ah, for this year, fiscal year 2021, and so we're
14 able to start hiring, ah, and prepare for [inaudible]
15 and our pools, which is what we normally use them
16 for. Ah, but we still know ramping up will take some
17 time and that is why we want to thank all the
18 volunteers that have helped last year. Ah, we had
19 somewhat of the perfect storm. Ah, we had fewer
20 staff, 1700, but then more people were using our
21 parks. Ah, they became, ah, someone's office, their
22 [inaudible] gym, a stage, and so we saw people come
23 into parks at the same time it was a struggle for
24 staff to keep up. So I can tell you, ah, those were,
25 ah, one year, not, one shot, I'm sorry, [inaudible]

1
2 one year cuts. Ah, FY22 looks so much better, ah,
3 but in terms of 2021 this spring, ah, we're now
4 hiring the seasonals so that people would be ready
5 and prepared, supplemented with our litter campaign
6 and support from all of our volunteers.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. So, ah, the
8 fiscal 2022 preliminary budget does not include the
9 one-time funding of 10 million dollars successfully
10 negotiated by the City Council in the fiscal 2021
11 adopted budget. Has there been any discussion with
12 OMB of adding the 10 million dollars into the Parks
13 budget in the executive budget for fiscal year 2022?

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you for the
15 question, Council Member. Ah, as you know, this is
16 the preliminary budget and we have several months
17 before we moved into the adopted. I know, ah, it is
18 both important to the department, it's important to
19 the council, and important to the public, and I do
20 anticipate as the budget process continues, ah, this
21 will be one item that will be heavily discussed. Ah,
22 so I know how, ah, how difficult it was last year.
23 You knew that we would not be able to, ah, fund that,
24 ah, that one-shot, ah, budget item, and I'm confident
25 it will be part of the conversation this year, and I

1
2 look forward to engaging the council with OMB and the
3 mayor's office as we move towards, ah, the adopted
4 budget.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So can you explain to
6 the committee what will be the impact on parks, ah,
7 maintenance if the administration does not restore
8 this funding, which pays for 150 workers?

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Ah, Council Member, we
10 always find a way to get the job done. Ah, it was a
11 very difficult year last year, ah, and we made sure
12 we found a way of cleaning up the parks to the best
13 of our ability. I have to thank all the New Yorkers
14 and the volunteers who stepped up. Ah, but even with
15 limited resources we found a way to keep the parks
16 clean. We couldn't cut the grass as often as we'd
17 like to. Ah, we couldn't even, ah, collect the trash
18 as much as we'd like to. But we came up with our
19 litter campaign where people could dispose of their
20 trash in corrals, ah, and so a while that helps, ah,
21 we'll see how the budget unfolds and we'll sit down
22 and be creative to figure out ways we can continue to
23 give New Yorkers the very best park experience. Ah,
24 as you know, I always to see more staff to help our
25 parks and our gardens. Ah, but we also have to deal

1
2 with the budget reality and the budget we're handed
3 to, ah, the leadership team, we'll figure out how do
4 we find a way of maintaining our parks to the quality
5 that New Yorkers find acceptable.

6 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. So given
7 the current sanitary condition of our parks, would
8 you consider the loss of this finding upsetting?

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Again, ah, if you
10 look at our parks today, ah, we still maintain the
11 quality of parks. Ah, it may have taken us a few
12 days, ah, to address, ah, some of the litter
13 conditions, ah, but I'm confident that with the staff
14 we have we can still maintain a clean and safe park
15 system. Ah, more staff is always helpful. But we've
16 learned over the past, as I have seven years, ah,
17 that we have to work with the budget we have. If
18 given more I can do more, but if given less we have
19 to be smarter and more innovative to ensure we
20 maintain our park system and the quality that the
21 public expects.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. Ah, before I ask
23 any, any question I want to say that we are also
24 joined by Council Member Gennaro. The fiscal 2022
25 preliminary budget savings plan include one-time 50

1 million dollar savings in fiscal 2021 to Parks'
2 Opportunity Program, POP, which is funded by NYC
3 Human Resources Department and administered by the
4 Parks Department. What is the current number of
5 participants enrolled in this program?
6

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Ah, let me defer
8 that to, ah, Assistant Commissioner David Stark or
9 Joy Wang.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Let's go to David
12 Stark.

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER STARK: Ah, yeah,
14 hi. Hi, everybody. So we have, ah, 1080 POPs right
15 now. The savings that came out of our budget are all
16 reflected in the earlier part of the year when we
17 weren't able to hire people, and we expect to not hit
18 the numbers that were at the high in the last two
19 years but come up to right around 1300 POPs by April
20 and hopefully, hopefully get close to 2000 by July.
21 So we are hiring right now. OMB has approved the
22 hires and HRA is working with our staff to bring in
23 people and it's a, a great job here. We have a lot
24 of POPs that we find full-time employment at NYCHA
25 with benefits when they've been with us for over a

1
2 year and we've been able to extend the POPs that here
3 for over six months so no one was losing their job
4 when we weren't able to hire new POPs and, ah, it's
5 looking better than before. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So can you help us in
7 the committee to understand the importance of these
8 workers to Parks maintenance.

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: They're vitally
10 important. Ah, a huge percentage of our maintenance
11 staff, ah, in some cases are, ah, POP workers. Ah,
12 we value them as part of our family. So you may, if
13 you did not know, I changed the uniforms to make sure
14 they look like they're part of the Parks Department
15 because they are. We revamped the orientation to
16 communicate that they are welcome to the Parks
17 Department and then we work hard to find them full-
18 time employment, either in Parks, with NYCHA, or the
19 private sector. They play a vital role and you see
20 them out there all the time and so, ah, there's a,
21 what used to be, ah, equivalency graduation every
22 year, something I would not miss because of the pride
23 we have, ah, in these workers. Ah, we want to see
24 them grow. We want to see them move into employment.
25 And so we're very proud of this agency that we, ah,

1
2 employ more POPs than any other agency by far in New
3 York City. So it's a vital program to us at the
4 agency. They provide a vital resource to New Yorkers
5 by cleaning and maintaining the parks. So it's a
6 critically important program and I'm proud, ah, to
7 be, ah, the agency that are able to work, ah, with
8 our POP workers.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. So what was
10 the pre-pandemic level of funding for POP and what is
11 the level of funding included in the budget for
12 fiscal 2022?

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Let me defer that
14 question back to, ah, Commissioner Stark.

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER STARK: In fiscal
16 2022 we have the full budget and we'll be hiring, ah,
17 approximately an average of 1700 POPs are funded at
18 any given time and the numbers ebb and flow. As you
19 know, in our peak season we try to have over 2000 and
20 in winter the number comes down a bit, and our budget
21 was cut by a total of 18 million dollars this fiscal
22 year but that was all through accruals when we are on
23 pause during the earlier parts of the pandemic, and
24 even now we're maintaining social distancing and
25 we're limited to hiring approximately 300 a month as

1 we don't have any class bigger than 10 to 15 people
2 right now.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, so what was the
5 pre-pandemic level of funding for POP?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER STARK: It was
7 approximately 60 million.

8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Six-zero? 60?

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER STARK: Yes, 60,
10 60 million, six-zero.

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Oh. So it was cut a
12 lot then.

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER STARK: Well, we
14 did not hire POPs for around, you know, four or five
15 months.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Oh.

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER STARK: And, ah,
18 we were coming from a low number. So the savings
19 were done through the accruals of not having the full
20 staff.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. So maybe you can
22 stay for the, for my next question. Ah, given that
23 most seasonal staff are brought in before the fiscal
24 year actually begins, how many park workers are
25 impacted by the 50 million dollar reduction, and how

1
2 will the reduction impact Parks maintenance in the
3 next couple of months as the weather begins to
4 improve.

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Let me answer the
6 first part...

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: ...and I'll let
9 Commissioner Stark answer the second. Ah, we plan,
10 we plan our seasonal plan way in advance and we're
11 gratified that all of those, the seasonal plan, was
12 as authorized to move forward. Ah, we start doing
13 the hiring in March, ah, where we prep for the fields
14 and the pools and so that hiring and work is under
15 way. So we're very grateful that that seasonal plan
16 was authorized to proceed forward. So we will be
17 ready, ah, for the spring. Ah, so that's the answer
18 to that question and I'll turn it to Commissioner
19 Stark for the second part.

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER STARK: So the
21 really good news is last July we had 1000 POPs
22 working for us at a time when we hope to have between
23 1800 and 2000. This July we'll be much close to
24 having 2000 POPs working for us, and we will have
25 1300 POPs by April.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK, thank you, yeah.
3 Ah, we are also joined by Council Member Holden. Ah,
4 my next question is the November 2020 savings plan
5 for Parks include, it includes a hiring freeze, ah,
6 of 46 positions that will generate savings of 1
7 million dollars, starting in fiscal 2022. What job
8 titles exactly are subject to this cut, and again
9 what will be the anticipated effect of this cut on
10 the agency's operations?

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Ah, Council Member
12 Koo, I'll have to get back to you on specifically
13 those 46 positions. I'm not sure the exact titles.
14 There's no question the hiring freeze could affect
15 our operations. Ah, I've met with all my leadership
16 team to find out which ones we have to prioritize.
17 As you know, ah, we're able to hire one for every
18 three positions. Ah, we'll work with OMB to try to
19 restore those positions in a couple key areas. It's
20 very critical in areas of technology, ah, so this is
21 something we can you specifically [inaudible] 46
22 positions. But we are trying to work with OMB to
23 ensure we can get, ah, that hiring, ah, the hiring
24 process in place so that we can restore some of these
25 critical functions.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK, yeah. So my next
3 question is regarding one part in the mayor's 2021
4 State of the City address. Following the release of
5 the fiscal 2022 preliminary budget the mayor
6 announced several new, new initiatives in his State
7 of the City address, all of which being creating a
8 city clean-up corps which proposed to hire 10,000 New
9 Yorkers to clean up neighborhoods. Would the
10 initiative include any support for the Parks
11 Department and how realistic is it considering the
12 current budget challenge?

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Council Member Koo,
14 thank you for the question. To my knowledge, ah, I
15 believe it is not specifically for Parks. I believe
16 these are neighborhoods and streets and to us, so,
17 ah, to my knowledge these were focused on other
18 areas. If you recall, there was a lot of concern
19 about cuts to Sanitation, ah, litter overflowing, ah,
20 on trash cans, on the streets, and I know there was a
21 big concern, ah, about, ah, supplementing what was
22 happening on the streets and a lot of BIDs, ah, do
23 some of their own, ah, sanitation cleanup. But my
24 understanding is that was primarily focused on
25 neighborhoods, ah, not focused on parks unless it's

1 the perimeter, ah, of a park, which would be the
2 sidewalk.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Hmm, OK. So, ah, now I
5 will turn over the questions, ah, from my colleagues
6 in the committee. Mr. Sartori, ah, do we have other
7 council members who want to ask questions?

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes we do, ah, Chair.
9 Ah, thank you. At this time I will call on other
10 council members to ask their questions in the order
11 that they have used the Zoom raise hand function. If
12 you'd like to ask a question and you have not yet
13 used the Zoom raise hand function please raise it
14 now. Council members, please keep your questions to
15 five minutes. The Sergeant at Arms will keep a timer
16 and will let you know when your time is up. You
17 should begin once I've called on you and the sergeant
18 has announced that you may begin delivering or asking
19 your questions. Ah, we will first, ah, hear
20 questions from Council Member Holden, who will be
21 followed by Council Member Salamanca.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins now.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thanks,
24 Commissioner, for all your, your service, ah, to the
25 parks, ah, of New York City and, um, I want to thank

1
2 you for all the innovative programs you've created in
3 the past and, ah, hopefully, um, ah, they'll, they'll
4 go on for years. But I, I just want, I have a few
5 questions, ah, regarding, um, I had asked this
6 several times at hearings, concerning street trees
7 and, ah, I don't believe I've gotten an, an answer,
8 um, ah, what's the individual cost of street tree
9 plantings in the City of New York?

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Ah, I do know we
11 worked on getting the cost down. Ah, I'm gonna defer
12 to, ah, Commissioner Kavanagh while I go to my notes
13 because he may have it at the top of his head.
14 Prices have gone up, ah, but we've tried to work to
15 get the prices down as low as possible. But I'll
16 now defer to Commissioner Kavanagh for that response.

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:
18 Thank you, Commissioner Silver. Ah, and yes, the
19 current average cost for planting a tree in New York
20 City is \$3400. Ah, it's less in some boroughs, like
21 Staten Island. It's more in Manhattan. Ah, it is,
22 it is increased significantly over the last three
23 years. Ah, we are taking a number of steps, ah, to,
24 ah, to try to reduce those costs, ah, including
25 increasing the number of qualified potential bidders,

1
2 ah, for our contracts. Um, we are looking at our
3 specifications to see which ones, ah, may be driving
4 the cost increases that we've seen and we're taking
5 advantage of the new, ah, M/WBE contracting
6 authority, ah, to find more opportunities in smaller
7 contracts, ah, we hope will result in lower prices.
8 We have gotten a few bids back recently. Ah, the
9 results have been encouraging, ah, but we have not
10 awarded any contracts yet, so it's too soon to say
11 whether or not we have, ah, found a way to
12 significantly reduce the cost over the entire city.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah, \$3400 is
14 obscene for, for planting a single tree and, ah, it
15 seems that we still don't have a solution to this.
16 I've been, this is going on over a year now, ah, that
17 we haven't, the \$3400, we're getting, we're getting,
18 um, soaked. The taxpayers of New York City are
19 getting soaked. It's not acceptable. So I, I think
20 we have to come up with an innovative program and not
21 just keep kicking the can down the, the road here.
22 Um, another question, Commissioner, or, ah,
23 Commissioner Kavanagh, um, after Tropical Storm
24 Isaias and other storms, um, several street trees
25 came down, as you know, and it was really, um, quite

1
2 devastating to many neighborhoods around the city.
3 Um, yet I still have sidewalks that were lifted
4 considerably that have not been repaired and one
5 homeowner constituent's sidewalk was so raised by the
6 tree that was uprooted that the homeowner's insurance
7 company is threatening to drop him, drop his, his
8 insurance because it's a hazard and Parks and DOT
9 will not repair the, the storm damage. Um, did, did
10 the Parks budget get any more money from the city,
11 ah, extra emergency money, to repair sidewalks or
12 trees that were uprooted?

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'm going to defer
14 to Commissioner Kavanagh. You're correct, this is
15 primarily DOT with some, ah, Parks involvement, but
16 I'll defer to Commissioner Kavanagh, ah, for that
17 response.

18 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Ah,
19 Council Member, yes, ah, we are keenly aware of the
20 sidewalks that were damaged by Tropical Storm Isaias.
21 The Parks Department with working with DOT has
22 identified, ah, over 600 sidewalks citywide that need
23 to be repaired. We, the Parks Department, have
24 completed removal of any stumps, ah, that were in the
25 way that would have made sidewalk repair difficult.

1
2 DOT is working through the contracting process to
3 actually, ah, do the repairs. Um, and, ah, we should
4 have a, a projected date soon as to when that work
5 will start, ah, but if you have an instance where
6 someone is facing the situation that you describe,
7 ah, please give us the details and we will try to
8 work with that owner.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Ah, I, I did
10 that, Commissioner, and still no, no movement. And
11 the homeowner's insurance will be dropped. So this
12 is outrageous that we're victims, the homeowners are
13 victims, obviously, where the tree comes down and
14 damages, ah, not only their block and, and the
15 sidewalks and then they, they can't get it fixed.
16 And, um, you know, we need to know. We, we can't
17 have this, ah, ping pong game going between DOT and
18 Parks. Who's responsible? Who's going to fix it?
19 And when are they gonna fix it? And do they have to
20 deal, they have to do this in a timely, um, basis
21 because the, the sidewalk is lifted like three feet
22 still and people can't walk, and we have this all
23 over the city. So there's got to be emergency money
24 put aside. Ah, also on, on that I've got, you know,

2 another issue is I've gotten several complaints that
3 rest rooms are being...

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: ...closed in parks
6 at, at 3:00 p.m. when, when, when our, our, ah,
7 obviously our residents need the parks more than ever
8 now. So is, is that really a kind of citywide policy
9 or is that individual district managers deciding to,
10 cut corners?

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Ah,
12 it's not a question of cutting corners, Council
13 Member. Ah, during the late fall, winter, and early
14 spring, ah, we do reduce our, our [inaudible] hours
15 mostly because we do not have the seasonal staff to
16 extend those hours. Typically in mid March we start
17 building back up as the seasonal staff comes on board
18 throughout the agency. Ah, so you will be seeing...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: But [inaudible]
20 the restrooms [inaudible].

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:
22 ...longer hours regardless...

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Rest rooms are,
24 then close the park. If you're not gonna, you know,
25 people have to, you know, have to go to the bathroom,

1
2 have to go to the restroom. So to close it at 3:00,
3 um, you know, when the parks are, are being heavily
4 used, especially in early spring, is, is cruel.

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:

6 Council Member, we do make that adjustment and we'll
7 make sure that it is followed consistently, ah,
8 throughout the city, especially in your district.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Could you, could
10 you, um, answer, and just one more, if, if I may, ah,
11 if I may, Chair. Could you, who's working remotely
12 in Parks? Are park supervisors working remotely or
13 district managers? Are they allowed to work
14 remotely?

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Ah,
16 no. I, I have to say and give a lot of credit to our
17 field staff. They have worked every day since the
18 start of the pandemic outdoors, interacting with the
19 public, ah, and doing their job as normal. There
20 are...

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: What, what titles
22 are working remotely, cause I've, I've seen a lot of
23 parks with [inaudible]...

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We have, ah, we
25 have roughly about 20% of our administrative staff is

1
2 working remotely. About 80% and all of our, ah,
3 staff that work in the field, ah, are working in the
4 field. So it's about 20%, ah, mostly, ah, from our
5 capital, ah, our administrative, our, ah, IT folks,
6 ah, they're all working, teleworking remotely, but
7 it's about 20%.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you. Thank
9 you, Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK, thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is
12 Council Member Salamanca, followed by Council Member
13 D. Diaz.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: All right.
16 Good morning, Commissioner. Can you hear me?

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Yes, good
19 morning. First, Commissioner, I just want to say how
20 sad I was to hear that you are leaving the Parks
21 Department. Um, I've working in government as a
22 district manager and as a council member, ah, for the
23 last 11 years now. And, um, and prior to that I was
24 a community board member, Community Board 2. I have
25 never dealt with a commissioner who actually listened

1
2 to the community and I just want to say thank you for
3 all of your hard work and your partnership in working
4 with residents here in the South Bronx. Um, it was
5 through your initiative that, ah, my district got at
6 least six to seven playgrounds either renewed or
7 brand-new playgrounds, and this was through the Parks
8 Community Partnership Initiative that you, ah,
9 incorporated and I just want to say thank you.

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you so much.
11 I appreciate that.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Now, um, what
13 I do know, I do want to talk a little bit about my
14 frustrations with the Parks Department, and that's
15 capital dollars. Um, Commissioner, in, in 2018 we
16 allocated close to, I would say, a little under 2
17 million dollars between the mayor and myself for, um,
18 baseball lights in two baseball fields in my, in my
19 community. This is fiscal year 2018. It is still,
20 I, I, it still in the procurement process. It is
21 unacceptable that this is still going through the
22 procurement process, um, and at the last hearing that
23 I saw you face to face, I would say a year ago, you,
24 you agreed that this was unacceptable, and here we
25 are today working on fiscal year 2022 and I still,

1
2 it's still going through the procurement process. In
3 2019 I allocated, ah, a, ah, mobile command, ah,
4 station for Crotona Park. It's still nothing. You
5 know, um, I'm talking to the, the assistant
6 commissioner for urban park services and I feel like
7 I'm getting the run-around here. You know, one, one,
8 um, one explanation is that DCAS is holding it back.
9 Another explanation is that OMB is holding it back,
10 and to be quite frank, Commissioner, I don't think
11 I'm gonna allocate any funding to Parks Department
12 for capital dollars if I'm giving you, um, this
13 capital dollars and it's just sitting there. It's a
14 waste.

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, I'm gonna
16 defer to, ah, ah, Commissioner Braddick shortly. Ah,
17 clearly part of that was COVID, but I know that's not
18 gonna [inaudible] a response. You know, let me just
19 it this way. While I have been here we have made
20 substantial progress in the capital process. I'll be
21 the first to tell you when I came on board I was
22 stunned on how long it took to complete a capital
23 project. We reformed the design, ah, phase. Ah,
24 we're able to exceed, ah, timelines on the
25 construction side, even completing it on time, and I

1
2 concur that more work is needed on the procurement
3 side, ah, and so that is something that unfortunately
4 I will not be able to complete, but I'm confident
5 that this council and the future mayor needs to focus
6 on the procurement. However, ah, I want to get the
7 details about what happened. Ah, any capital project
8 has to go through the same timeline, ah, because it's
9 capital dollars. So it is unfortunate and I will
10 defer to Commissioner Braddick to find out more
11 detail, but, as you know, I've worked very hard to
12 get as many projects done in your community. There
13 was no intent in slowing this down. Um, I'm equally,
14 ah, frustrated at times by the process but, however,
15 we made substantial changes over the past seven years
16 and I'm confident those, those improvements will
17 occur even better into the future.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Commissioner,
19 the [inaudible] playground that you, that we, ah, we
20 did a ribbon cutting, um, I think that you approved
21 it around the same time that I allocated this
22 funding. The park got redone, we did a ribbon
23 cutting, and my project is still in the procurement
24 process, and a park got completed during that time.

1
2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Ah, I hear you.
3 Ah, we, all of us agree that improvements have been
4 made and more improvements need to be made in the
5 procurement process. Ah, and so after this meeting
6 I'll sit down and find out exactly specifically
7 what's happening with your project, so you're not
8 hearing from different parts of the agency, you'll be
9 hearing from me directly and Commissioner Braddick of
10 capital so we can get you a straight answer and find
11 out what's going on. I share your frustration. I
12 know you called me. You're committed to providing
13 quality parks for your community. I feel the same
14 way you do, and I will figure out, ah, in the time I
15 have left what we need to do to unstick and move
16 those projects forward. Because I do not want you to
17 stop funding our parks, you know how important it is
18 to the community, and so let's figure this out
19 because I know your heart, I know how much you love
20 parks, ah, and so we'll have to figure this out
21 together.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Is the, the
23 commissioner for capital on, then could I ask her
24 some of these questions?

1
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: Um, yes,
3 Council Member, and thank you very much, and I, ah, I
4 share your concern, ah, as, as does Commissioner
5 Silver, and you know that we do, we try to do our
6 best to move things along as quickly as possible. I
7 understand about the, the two ball field, ah, the
8 lighting both at..

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: ...Bill
11 Rainey and at, ah, Julio Carballo. Um, it, it's just
12 unfortunate because, um, last year when those
13 projects were stuck in procurement everything was put
14 on pause at that point in time and is only being
15 lifted by OMB as of the end of March this year.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: This funding
17 was allocated in fiscal year 18, Commissioner, 18.
18 You cannot use the excuse of COVID when you had this
19 money since fiscal year 18. It's [inaudible] excuse.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: I
21 understand your frustration. I am, ah, I'm sorry
22 you, you feel that way. It's just that we were not
23 allowed to move projects through, any project, any
24 project that was in procurement at the time that OMB
25 paused those were not allowed to move forward. So

1
2 unfortunately that, those two projects got stuck,
3 along with about 300 other projects at the same time.
4 However, we have the very, very good news that those
5 projects are being repaused as of March 26
6 [inaudible]...

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: ...as
9 possible.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: All right.

12 Thank you, Chair.

13 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Council Member
14 Salamanca, are you OK?

15 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Yeah.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: [inaudible]?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Yeah, yeah.

18 No, I'm, I'm OK, thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. So, ah, we
20 will go to, we will be going to a second round of
21 questions. So, ah, my colleagues, please limit your
22 questions to five minutes.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair.

24 CHAIRPERSON KOO: We'll do a second round
25 later, yeah.

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 52
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes. Thank you,
3 Chair Koo. Ah, the next council member with
4 questions is Council Member D. Diaz, who will be
5 followed by Council Member Gjonaj.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER D. DIAZ: Good morning. I
8 want to thank both Chair Koo for this opportunity to
9 bring forth this conversation and for Commissioner
10 Silver for the excellent work of our trash removal
11 that's occurring in my biggest local park, which is
12 Highland Park. My question is more towards noise
13 pollution, which is growing in high resources in
14 Highland Park and the upper Highland Park near the
15 monastery. I would like to know what conversations
16 you're having or you have had in reference to the
17 noise pollution. My understanding is you have about
18 25 nuns there, retirement age, who are looking to
19 exit that area due to the noise pollution by their
20 residence. That's my first question.

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you, Council
22 Member. Ah, this is the first I'm hearing about it.
23 Ah, I will work with our Urban Park Service, that's
24 our Parks enforcement patrol, ah, to find what's
25 going on, as well as the park administrator. Ah, I'm

1
2 not sure whether it's noise. We have a trend, ah,
3 young people on motorcycles and making loud noise,
4 whether it's amplified music, because people just
5 want to get outdoors with COVID. I'm not sure the
6 noise you're referring to, but I will reach out to
7 the park administrator as well as the department
8 [inaudible] patrol to go by the location you're
9 referring to find out what's going on and then we'll
10 figure out, ah, what remedy is necessary.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER D. DIAZ: I apologize.
12 I'll be more direct. When I, when I say noise
13 pollution I, I'm 4 foot 9 and a quarter and the
14 speakers that are being established there between
15 5:00 and 10:00, you know, are taller than I am. So
16 it's, I'm extremely saddened and disturbed by the
17 fact that this conversation has not been elevated to,
18 to you. Then my next question is in reference to
19 Forestry. As, as the park is being utilized more so
20 than ever my understanding as early as this morning
21 was a conversation with Forestry in removing the
22 branches and pruning the trees. They're waiting for,
23 I don't know if it's for a senior to be bumped in the
24 head by a branch or what's gonna get the attention
25 that we need at Highland Park. Forestry is saying

1
2 mid to early summer, they're gonna go and take care
3 of what I see to be an urgent issue.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, I'm gonna
5 defer to Commissioner Kavanagh in a second. Our
6 approach is a risk-based approach, ah, and what
7 happens is that to determine, ah, what is the highest
8 risk from A, B, C, and D, and then they have a
9 certain timeframe to go out there and address the
10 situation. Ah, I'll, I'll defer to Commissioner
11 Kavanagh specifically about Highland Park. We do
12 benefit from having an administrator there, but also
13 our Forestry team is the best in country. Ah, so I'm
14 sure we do not want to keep the public in danger.
15 I'll defer to Commissioner Kavanagh if he knows
16 specifically about the situation, ah, in the park.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER D. DIAZ: Thank you.

18 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Ah,
19 thank you, Commissioner Silver, and good morning,
20 Council Member.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER D. DIAZ: Good morning.

22 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Ah,
23 I'm not personally familiar with the situation you
24 described, but as Commissioner Silver did say, ah, we
25 base our maintenance program on, on risk. Ah, we

1
2 evaluate the trees based on the potential that they
3 have for causing injury or property damage, ah, and,
4 ah, you know, we, we prioritize our work accordingly.
5 Ah, however, ah, we'll be happy to review the, the
6 problem that you've identified and see if there is
7 some way that we can address it, ah, both within the
8 context of our priorities and in the, in response to
9 the problems that it appears to be causing.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER D. DIAZ: And so within
11 what timeframe can I expect a call back? It's going
12 to be 70 degrees today and the last thing I want is
13 to be told I had a call at 7 o'clock this morning and
14 7 o'clock this evening a branch fell on someone.

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:
16 Council Member, we'll certainly call you this
17 afternoon to understand exactly what you're talking
18 about. I don't know if we'll be able to go out and
19 assess the situation until sometime early next week.
20 Ah, but obviously if there was a, a dangerous
21 condition we would be out there assessing it today.
22 Um, I don't know what the, you know, the history of
23 the inspection is for this particular condition that
24 you're concerned about. But we will call you today
25 to confirm what, what it is, where it is, and we will

2 have a, an inspection performed and, and inform you
3 of the results.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER D. DIAZ: No, I, I, again,
5 maybe I wasn't clear in my question or expressing
6 myself. My understanding is that it has been
7 assessed and the return time for rectifying the
8 situation is mid, mid spring to early summer. I have
9 an issue with that.

10 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:

11 Council Member, again, I'm not familiar with the
12 particulars of this condition. Ah, but, again, based
13 on the risk that it presents and the volume of work
14 that we have to address it may take that long to, to
15 address the condition.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER D. DIAZ: Thank you. I'm
17 done.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Ah, we are
19 also joined by Council Member Mark Levine.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Ah, Mr. Sartori, who's
22 the next Council Member?

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, thank you,
24 Chair. Ah, the next Council Member is Council Member
25 Gjonaj, followed by Council Member Moya.

1
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Thank you, Chair
4 Koo. Um, Commissioner Silver, I just want to echo
5 some of the comments made by my colleagues. Um, I've
6 enjoyed working with you, alongside of you. Um, I'm
7 grateful for the service that you've done to Parks
8 and the City of New York. I know that at many times
9 we butted heads with the intentions of solving
10 problems. I hope with the amount of, the short
11 amount of time you have left in your current position
12 that you will finally figure out the capital
13 procurement problem, the debacle with comfort
14 stations, ah, and all of the trees that need to be
15 removed and all the sidewalks that need to be
16 repaired. I'm trusting you and I'm hopeful that
17 you're gonna say today that yes, before you leave
18 you'll address these issues.

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Um, thank you,
20 Council Member Gjonaj. Ah, that is a hard charge for
21 three months, but the good news is, ah, we have
22 addressed the comfort station issue. We managed to
23 control costs. We actually did a very interesting
24 exercise last year to look at a different approach
25 towards comfort stations. So that is ready to go,

1
2 ah, once we try that pilot, so at least that one we
3 can check the box. In terms of capital, I know over
4 the years I've taken a, a lot of heat. But I have to
5 say, I am, I'm going to be [inaudible] and say this
6 with the capital staff that we're extremely proud of
7 what we were able to do. This administration has now
8 completed under my tenure over 843 capital projects.
9 That is the third most in history of all
10 commissioners, and I've only been here now for seven
11 years. We were able to cut the process from four to
12 six months. COVID did pause a lot of our projects
13 and so I'm confident, as I stated, ah, ah, to Council
14 Member Salamanca, we really have to work as a team,
15 not just Parks, the city and a team to address
16 procurement. We've been able to streamline design
17 and we're performing very well at construction, but
18 procurement continues to be a challenge. I think
19 once you focus on that aspect of the process you're
20 gonna see projects move a lot quicker. I'll to do as
21 much as I can or leave a letter for the next mayor in
22 an envelope 'cause we're not, don't have enough time
23 to perform procurement in three months. But I want
24 to thank this mayor. I want to thank OMB for the

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2 improvements we have made, as well as other agencies,
3 but there's still more work to do.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Commissioner,
5 thank you for that, and the, ah, the sincerity in
6 your voice resonates with all of us.

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: The tree problem
9 is a major concern, not only from the liability
10 aspects, the safety of those that [inaudible]
11 sidewalks and those that can be hurt by using the
12 sidewalks and the liability that falls on homeowners
13 that you heard from my other colleague there, the
14 insurance now is not going to be renewed. These
15 [inaudible]. These are the single-largest
16 investments of our homeowners. It's not the
17 responsibility of the homeowner. If they touch it
18 now it becomes their problem. We really need to do,
19 ah, put more effort and resource and true commitment
20 to this [inaudible] hazards to both pedestrians and
21 homeowners.

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Ah, understood,
23 Council Member, and as Commissioner Kavanagh said,
24 ah, we will be reaching out to DOT today, ah, to get
25 a better understanding of the timeline about how we

1
2 can proceed. We understand the impact and Council
3 Member Holden was very clear. Ah, we do not want our
4 homeowners and our residents to be put in that
5 position. Ah, we'll gather this afternoon and figure
6 out what we can do to move quicker going forward. I
7 don't know if that's an option for emergency, ah,
8 dollars or certainly I would say this is a crisis and
9 it's a concern. We'll circle back to see what we can
10 do to give the homeowners, ah, more certainty about
11 how the [inaudible] regarding, ah, the sidewalk
12 conditions.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Commissioner, if
14 they could have your office follow up with me, I have
15 a list of properties that are similar to what Council
16 Member Holden raised as example, where the sidewalk
17 is more than two feet off the ground, unpassable, and
18 it's been a number of years. And there's still other
19 properties. And I just want to continue, um, as we
20 talk about the procurement process and how we move
21 forward, I'm a big fan of concessions. So even
22 Orchard Beach and the, ah, tens of millions of
23 dollars that are gonna be needed to bring that, our
24 parks up to date and reinvest in that, ah, wonderful,
25 ah, beach of ours, we should be looking at

1
2 concessions. Put them into the hands of those that
3 when we do this they do it with their money. We can
4 oversee it. Ah, it would be a partnership that I
5 think we would all benefit, especially in a time of
6 economic, ah, crisis, such as this, where we're
7 looking at budget cuts. Let's save taxpayer dollars.
8 We can use the concessions that are out there that
9 would love to take on this project, take advantage of
10 that one thousand parked car parking lot that you
11 have and the beautiful beach that we have along with
12 all the amenities that make Orchard Beach such an
13 attractive place in New York City's largest
14 [inaudible].

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, Council
16 Member Gjonaj...

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: ...maybe you're
19 ahead of your time. Ah, Orchard Beach project is
20 restarting and so, you know, concessions is
21 envisioned, ah, being part of that redesigned
22 pavilion. So, ah, you're right on target. You and I
23 have talked about this. Ah, we will see as the
24 project unfolds, but there's certainly a, a desire to
25 have concessions there.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: And, as I just
3 wrap it up, ah, Chair Koo. Commissioner, it was...

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah, please. Please
5 do it as you're fast, yeah.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Just to put out a
7 big shout-out because you're, I'm only fond of one
8 other person more than your Parks Department and that
9 is the Bronx Commissioner Iris Rodriguez. So second
10 to her, Commissioner, you are my favorite
11 commissioner.

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you, thank
13 you, ah, and thank you for your service as well.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Ah, next,
15 ah, council member with questions is Council Member
16 Moya, who will be followed by Council Member Levine.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Thank you, Chair
19 Koo. Ah, good afternoon, or good morning, ah,
20 Commissioner Silver. Ah, just wanted to, ah, again,
21 ah, reiterate just what my colleague said. Thank you
22 for your service to the City of New York. Ah, we
23 really appreciate it. I had to phone my mother to
24 let her know that the person who was responsible for
25 getting her hooked onto that website, ah, is now

1
2 finally leaving. Ah, but, ah, she wants to say thank
3 you on, ah, her behalf. Ah, I also want to
4 acknowledge, ah, our Queens commissioner,
5 Commissioner Dockett, who has been absolutely
6 fantastic, responsive, ah, at every call that we make
7 and, um, Matt Sheraton, who was the administrator
8 for, ah, Community Boards 3 and 4, both have been
9 fantastic, Commissioner, and they deserve
10 recognition. Ah, now getting to the question. Is,
11 ah, I know that we're talking about, ah, opening up
12 our Parks and the usage here. Um, for me, ah, I
13 think I've expressed this to you and, and to several
14 folks in the administration here, ah, about, ah, the
15 issues that we're having in our parks in districts
16 like mine, ah, where our children, our seniors can't
17 utilize this. They're, it's being overrun by people
18 who are, ah, either smoking marijuana or drinking in
19 public. Ah, it's become a major issue for us, um,
20 now for years. Ah, I talk about this because I
21 wanted to ask you, ah, you know, what is the current
22 level of funding for the PEP officers this year? Um,
23 and also, you know, considering the, the recent
24 dramatic increase in park usage what would be the
25 ideal number of PEP officers, ah, and Urban Rangers

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2 needed to control our parks? I want to acknowledge
3 all the PEP officers, ah, in Queens and through the
4 city who have been doing a tremendous job. Ah, I've
5 had the privilege of actually going out to the parks
6 with them, ah, and having the opportunity to see them
7 not only distribute masks but help, ah, actually, ah,
8 curb some of the problems that we're having. It's
9 just that there's not enough staffing to do it, um,
10 and when I have five parks being overrun, ah, that's
11 something that, you know, is not acceptable. The,
12 that is one of the number one complaints I get in, in
13 the community.

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, first, ah,
15 thank you, ah, for, for your comments and please tell
16 your mother I may be moving on but the tree map will
17 remain. So [inaudible]. Ah, I want to thank you for
18 the committee and also acknowledging our Parks
19 Enforcement Patrol and Urban Park Rangers. You know,
20 they have been unbelievable, ah, that they had to go
21 out there, not just the pandemic, but remember we
22 have a lot of protests out in our parks and they also
23 supported helping some of the commercial districts
24 for those businesses following, ah, social distancing
25 rules. So they have been amazing, ah, throughout

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2 this process, coming to work. Ah, so our current
3 level, I don't know the actual budget number but I
4 can tell you that the total number of, ah, our PEP,
5 both grant and tax levy, is 311. Ah, that's higher
6 than previous years, but that is supplemented by our
7 CSAs, it's called Park Security. It's about 373.
8 Now the PEP, the 311, they are peace officers. They
9 enforce [inaudible] rules. So they can make an
10 arrest. The CSAs have a radio, they'll have to call
11 for support. They cannot issue an arrest. I agree
12 with you. Ah, I would certainly like to have more,
13 but in terms of crime, ah, and, and we do quality of
14 life, ah, summonses, but we rely on our partnership
15 with NYPD to support us. Ah, we have 311. Ah, they
16 have 35,000. So I have to tell you we want to make
17 sure we establish a strong relationship, particularly
18 in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, where we have one,
19 but that is a problem. After this meeting we'll
20 circle back with you to find out exactly where this
21 is happening because we certainly want our seniors
22 and our children to enjoy our public spaces,
23 particularly during COVID when it's more and more
24 important. So the numbers are 311. Ah, it was a
25 little bit different during COVID because we had to

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2 redeploy them so people weren't in locations they
3 weren't supposed to be. So they were doing a lot of
4 work, ah, but we use a hotspot approach where we have
5 substations in certain locations. We know the
6 locations where they have to go on patrol. But if
7 there's an area that's a concern let us know. We'll
8 send a team out there and we'll get the support of
9 NYPD if that's what is needed.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: I, I've done that,
11 Commissioner.

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Oh.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: I've had NYPD sit
14 with, with, with your, ah, commissioner of
15 enforcement. Ah, this is now going on close to five
16 years. Ah, I've even allocated money to put, ah, ah,
17 a substation at Park of the Americas. I have
18 Flushing Meadows Corona Park. But I have parks that
19 are located across the street from schools. We have,
20 ah, ah, you know, ah, people who company about not
21 only the, the drunks but the marijuana smoke, you
22 know, urination in the parks. I mean, this is, we're
23 overrun and I'm not using that word lightly. Ah, we
24 are overrun here and that's why I'm asking has that
25 been considered, ah, given the usage, to increase the

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2 number, ah, for, for PEP officers, ah, in this
3 budget?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: No. Ah, there is
5 no increase in the POP, PEP, at the line for, for
6 PEP. It will stay consistent. Right now, ah, I
7 don't, I don't know offhand if there are any
8 vacancies...

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER:[inaudible]
11 yeah, right now at 311 citywide for, for our PEP.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: That's just not
13 enough. That's not even enough to, to, to cover, ah,
14 Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Ah, you know, we, we
15 have, ah, one of the, the, the third- or fourth-
16 largest park in the city. Um, you know, it's
17 incredible that we are not putting in, ah, money, ah,
18 allocated into the budget to actually secure our
19 parks and make people in the City of New York and our
20 seniors, our children feel safe and that it is being
21 utilized in the appropriate manner, not just that's a
22 park, it's open and anyone can do whatever they want.
23 It is so critical, Commissioner, I cannot stress it
24 enough that we need to include money to increase the
25 number of PEP officers, ah, in the Parks Department.

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2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: One second, I'm
3 sorry. Ah, just my colleague is updating some
4 information. While it's not a consolation for this
5 budget, I do want to let you know that during this
6 administration the number of PEP have doubled. Ah,
7 ah, so clearly this is conversation we'll continue,
8 ah, as we see the recovery under way. I understand
9 what you're saying. Um, I will check back with our
10 staff to find out what is happening with those
11 conversations with the NYPD, ah, because I do believe
12 with the current staffing levels we should be able to
13 address the problem. That is unacceptable if that's
14 what's happening. But this administration doubled
15 the numbers. Ah, all I can say is as this, ah,
16 budget process continues we'll elevate the concerns
17 people are having and yours in particular.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Thank you,
19 Commissioner.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Council
21 Member Moya. Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, ah, Mr., yeah,
24 next, yeah.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes. Ah, next up is
3 Council Member Levine.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Well, thank you
6 so much, Chair Koo, and I hate to be repetitive,
7 Commissioner, but I am so grateful for your
8 leadership for our city's parks over the past seven
9 years. Ah, it has been an absolute pleasure to work
10 with you for me personally, both in my term as chair
11 of the Parks Committee and in the years since. Ah,
12 I'm just so grateful for the city parks and Community
13 Parks Initiative, Anchor Parks Initiative, ah, Parks
14 Without Borders, and, ah, your vision of an urban
15 planner who understood that you have to weave
16 together parks with the surrounding neighborhood. So
17 thank you for that, ah, and I, I certainly wish you
18 much, much success in the years ahead. Um, ah, I
19 wonder if you have data on the usage of parks over
20 the past year, which I had to say anecdotally feels
21 like one of the most heavy years of use ever. Do, do
22 we actually have numbers on that?

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We do not have
24 numbers. We reached out to our partners, ah, putting
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2 High Line aside because it was a unique type of park,
3 that was more...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Right.

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: ...of a [inaudible]
6 but across the board, ah, just [inaudible] they were
7 all telling us that we saw record numbers. Um, I
8 live near Prospect Park. I was stunned at what I
9 saw. Ah, going there some evenings, ah, seeing more
10 people there you thought a concert was underway. So
11 the answer is yes. Ah, because it was the only
12 social gathering place open that everyone was using
13 everything for parks. We don't have solid numbers,
14 but we can tell by the level of trash that was
15 collected and by just staff telling us how crowded
16 parks were. So the answer is yes [inaudible].

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Right,
18 absolutely, and, and, and I've seen it myself in
19 parks in uptown Manhattan. Ah, just extraordinary.
20 I mean, thank, thank goodness for our parks over the
21 past year, getting them, imagine what hell we would
22 have been through without them. But this was a year
23 in which we endured a, a very substantial cut to
24 staffing. Ah, CPWs, the tremendous workers,
25 gardeners, ah, PEP officers, um, Urban Park Rangers.

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2 And so we were in effect asking this staff to do
3 more, ah, with less help in a year where we also had
4 the complication of the COVID safety protocols and, I
5 mean, this is probably the hardest year to have been
6 a Parks worker, maybe ever, but definitely in recent
7 memory. And, ah, so, so and, and, and I'm sure you
8 understand that and it's just critical that we
9 restore those cuts, first and foremost because
10 there's just so much work to do in the parks to keep
11 them well maintained and beautiful and safe, but
12 also, I think, just in fairness to the workers who
13 have endured, ah, such a rough year. Um, what, what
14 is, what is the restoration in, in this, in the
15 executive budget at this point, and understanding
16 that the executive budget was prepared before the,
17 um, federal stimulus was passed does the 6 billion
18 dollars coming to the city, ah, mean that we can now
19 restore those cuts?

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, in terms of
21 the cuts, and first, thank you for those comments.
22 I've also appreciated working with you, both as Parks
23 chair then after. Ah, number one, ah, there were
24 restorations, ah, after the budget, ah, for the
25 pools, pruning, seasonals, OTPS, ah, and so those

1 were restored. So we're very happy that, ah, as of
2 this month OMB gave us approval to proceed with
3 hiring those seasonals, ah, so we could start
4 prepping our fields and pools. It will happen this
5 year, in this fiscal budget. But the, the cut last
6 year was a one-year cut. So FY22 we'll see, ah,
7 what, similar to what the budget was, ah, before the
8 pandemic. So those restorations are in place. So
9 that's the answer to that specific question. Ah, in
10 terms of some of the other one-shots, you know, I
11 certainly understand last year when the 150,000 CPWs
12 and, and, and horticultural workers were cut. That
13 will be an ongoing conversation. Ah, clearly the
14 Parks Department have proven how valuable they are,
15 ah, during both regular times, but more importantly
16 during the pandemic, and I'm sure that would be a
17 major part of the conversation as we move towards,
18 ah, the executive budget. [inaudible].

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Thank you, sorry,
21 a little mute problem there. Ah, and my time is
22 almost up. Ah, we need not just the baseline cuts
23 restored but we need all of the, ah, the single-year
24 allocations that the Play Fair Coalition succeeded in
25 getting through with, with incredible advocacy from

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2 the council speaker and so many allies. Um, we need
3 all of that restored, ah, for the coming year. And,
4 and just in my time, very quick, I, I also want to
5 mention, um, the, the challenges faced in our
6 historic houses and the Parks...

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: ...system is, is
9 home to dozens of incredible treasures, um, one of
10 which is just a few blocks from my home, Jumel
11 Mansion, and they're, they're in such desperate need,
12 virtually all of them, and an infusion of capital to
13 upgrade, ah, their infrastructure. Can, can you
14 update us on the plan there and what can be done to,
15 to get them the resources they need in an expeditious
16 fashion?

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, ah, well, I
18 know time is running out. I'll have, ah,
19 Commissioner Braddick follow up with you. Ah, I
20 don't have the full capital plan of all the historic
21 houses, but I do know some capital work is going on
22 with a few of them, but we can get back to you, ah,
23 with a list. If you want to know specifically about
24 Jumel Mansion we can get that information as well. I

2 do know those capital projects some years ago. I
3 don't know what's in the planning going forward.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: I, I would
5 appreciate that to, to talk to Commissioner Braddick.
6 It's, it's not just Morris-Jumel, it's many of them,
7 ah, throughout the system. Ah, they have real needs,
8 and I think now is the time to double down in
9 investments there.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: My time is up.
12 Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Ah, we'll
16 now return to, ah, Chair Koo and other council
17 members for a second round of questions.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. Thank you. Ah,
19 Commissioner, thank you for your patience, yeah. My
20 next question is about Forestry and horticulture.
21 Ah, the fiscal 2022 preliminary plan includes 26
22 million dollars allocation for [inaudible] Street and
23 horticulture. It's less than 5% of the total past
24 budget of 533 million dollars. So do you consider
25

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2 this funding to be sufficient to properly maintain
3 our natural forests in the era of climate change?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, my first part
5 of the answer is yes, ah, because there were just
6 some productions in this fiscal year going forward
7 it's going to be similar than previous fiscal years
8 and we got the job done. We have an amazing Forestry
9 division. I would say it is the best in the country.
10 Ah, they know the importance of maintaining our urban
11 forests for all the reasons you've mentioned. And we
12 also have the Natural Areas Conservancy, another huge
13 part of it. Together we have advanced tremendously
14 the urban canopy and the health of urban forests, ah,
15 in our city. So I do believe we have an adequate
16 budget to get the job done. I will defer to
17 Commissioner Kavanagh to see if he has any additional
18 comments.

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Ah,
20 thank you, Commissioner Silver. And, yes, as you
21 know, the FY22 preliminary budget includes, ah, the
22 contract funding level that we had in prior years.
23 It will allow us to resume our block pruning cycle,
24 which is the cornerstone of our, our maintenance
25 program, and also to resume at a higher level the

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2 stump removal program. Ah, there is a enormous
3 amount of, of value in our tree, urban forest, ah,
4 and there is an unending list of things that we could
5 do there, but with the preliminary funding included
6 in the budget, ah, we will be able to resume the
7 level of service that we had provided in prior years.

8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Ah,
9 Commissioner, my next question is, ah, concerning the
10 concessions. The actual revenue generated by the
11 concessions in fiscal 2020 was 38 million dollars.
12 So what is the anticipated total revenue generated by
13 concessions in fiscal 2021?

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I will. OK, give
15 me one second...

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Sure.

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: ...because that was
18 a very specific number. So right now, ah, for the
19 first part of this year revenue is 10.5 million. Ah,
20 and clearly this is gonna be, ah, significantly less
21 than later years. So it's, for the first six months,
22 ah, was approximately 10.5 million.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: For fiscal 2021?

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: For fiscal 2021.

25 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK.

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2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Ah, so as you can
3 imagine, ah, for a lot of our concessions, ah, during
4 COVID, ah, they were concerned about opening. Ah, we
5 worked with those that had food operations to give
6 them guidance about how they can open. But there
7 were others who just felt it was not beneficial to do
8 so. If there were some other tennis facilities with
9 bubbles they were not able to open, so we could all
10 imagine last year was a, not a good year. But our
11 revenue division worked very closely with each
12 concession. Those that could open we let them know
13 how to open, but this includes tennis, golf course,
14 as well as our food and eating establishments. Ah,
15 it was a challenging year. Ah, we did not charge any
16 fees to make sure it was as easy to them to operate
17 and provide a service for employees, but in terms of
18 the revenue, ah, it is up 10.5 million so far, ah,
19 for this fiscal year.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So have any concession
21 agreements been revoked or amended in response to
22 COVID?

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: They're not being
24 amended. In terms of COVID, no. Ah, there have none
25 that have been quote unquote revoked due to COVID.

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CHAIRPERSON KOO: What about amended?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Nor amended. We just, our staff, we understand what was happening to COVID. Under the circumstances we worked with our concessions. There are, although they pay us, ah, fees and revenue from what they generate, we also know they were in the midst of a pandemic, and so we worked with them to make sure that they could continue, ah, and there were a number of different things that we were able to do with them. Ah, but we did not amend their agreements. There was latitude within our existing agreements to work, ah, with our concessions.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: So is there any, ah, flat fee or a minimum that the concessions, ah, must pay regardless of whether they are operating or not?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: That is a, let me respond this way. No rent has been charged with any of our concessions that have been closed due to the pandemic. Ah, I don't know all the contracts to know what they were obligated to pay. Certainly if they did make some revenue, I don't think there's someone from our revenue division to give a response to that question. We could certainly get back to you on that

1
2 one. But I'd have to say we've really worked
3 closely, ah, with our concessions to make sure that
4 they were not victims of the pandemic. Ah, 'cause,
5 again, they provide a very useful amenity to our park
6 users.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK, yeah. So, OK, my,
8 my next question is, ah, it's about historic houses.
9 So during our hearing on the historic houses last
10 year we learned the biggest need is for someone to do
11 minor historic buildings maintenance by repairing
12 windows and plaster. This position has been empty
13 since 2016 and we heard there are concerns that it
14 might no longer be a line item. Can you confirm
15 whether the position still exists?

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Ah, I'm, I don't
17 know if, ah, Commissioner Biederman will be able to
18 answer that question. I do know after the hearing we
19 sat down closely with both the administrator, ah, to
20 address some of the concerns raised at that hearing.
21 I do not recall specifically about the position that
22 you mentioned. There were other concerns raised at
23 that hearing. So I don't know, I don't want to put
24 Commissioner Biederman on the spot. Ah, this was
25 something I wasn't, ah, I'm not 100% clear. Ah, so,

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2 Commissioner Biederman, do you have any information,
3 or Commissioner Braddick, because this is something,
4 ah, it was not brought to my attention about this
5 position.

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: So
7 thanks, ah, Commissioner and, ah, thank you, ah,
8 Council Member Koo. Um, this is per, um,
9 Commissioner Silver, um, sort of globally looking at
10 how can, how can we respond to, um, some of the, ah,
11 some of the information that we got, um, in and
12 around the hearing around, ah, on historic houses,
13 um, has been an area of focus for both me and
14 Commissioner Braddick. I don't have an immediate
15 answer for you about that particular position,
16 though, and I will be happy to circle back with you
17 after the hearing.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So you will get back to
19 us?

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: Yes.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Because this is a
22 really simple question, whether the position exists
23 or not, yeah.

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I was not sure, you
25 were talking about the maintenance position. Ah, I

1 know each of the historic homes, you know, have their
2 own staff [inaudible] position. I'm not aware of a
3 global maintenance, ah, position specifically for
4 historic houses, so that's why I'm pausing. Um, I'm
5 a little bit unclear about the question and about
6 this position you're referring to. So that's why I'm
7 saying, it is a simple question, I just want to
8 understand, ah, what position you were referring to
9 because to my knowledge there is not a maintenance
10 person per se for all the historic houses. There
11 tends to be different arrangements. We do have our
12 trades that can support, but they do raise their own
13 funds to do some cosmetic work. But in terms of what
14 you're asking for I just have to double check.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. So please get back
17 to us, yeah. So many, many of the historic houses
18 have had to pivot due to the pandemic, but have had
19 trouble with their internet and outdated technology.
20 Some have received capital funding for technology
21 upgrades. If historic houses is given capital
22 funding for technology upgrades is Parks able to
23 ticket, ah, that project?

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: That is a good
25 question. Ah, not all technology, ah, requests is

1 capital. It could be expense. I'd have to find out,
2 ah, what type of technology they're talking about,
3 whether it could be bundled, ah, as a capital project
4 or could be expense funding. So that's something,
5 too, I'm gonna have to get back to you on because I
6 was not aware that there was some technology issues
7 with the historic houses. So that is something that
8 as expense we can easily address. Ah, so that's
9 something else that we promise to get back to you,
10 ah, with a response.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK, yeah, please get
13 back to us and we will communicate with you, yeah.
14 Um, the next question is on the PSAL spots, Public
15 Schools Athletic League. The mayor recently
16 announced that PSAL spots will receive an extended
17 season. Can you speak to the impact this would have
18 on PSAL leagues, such as adult leagues and summer
19 camps?

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, first, ah,
21 let me start by saying that yes, last week's
22 announcement, working very closely, ah, with PSAL to
23 find the details of their upcoming plan to offer
24 multiseason sports in the upcoming spring and summer
25 months. We'll work with PSAL leagues and other

1
2 permittees to accommodate as much of the usage as
3 possible. As I've also stated that we were are, our
4 [inaudible] plan was, ah, we're allow to start hiring
5 for our seasonal employees and so that would help us
6 prepare the fields for PSAL. Ah, but the answer is
7 we are now working with PSAL, ah, for that one and
8 we're also working on our capacity for, ah, both
9 summer camps, ah, as well. So that work initiated
10 after the mayor's announcement.

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. So have you
12 thought of, ah, about ways to extending paying time
13 to accommodate more leagues?

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Ah, we will look,
15 ah, to see what the permitting situation looks like
16 and what the demand is. Clearly, we always focus on
17 youth first and then adults second. Ah, so we'll see
18 what the capacity is. We'll see what the demand is
19 and then we'll make determinations. Ah, but since
20 the mayor's announcement we are very quickly, ah,
21 trying to make sure how we could accommodate, ah, all
22 those who want to have permits this summer and
23 spring.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. Before I go to the
3 next round of questions, ah, Mr. Sartori, do we have
4 any more council members who want to ask questions?

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, Council Member
6 Salamanca, ah, would be next for questions.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you, ah,
10 ah, thank you, Chair. Ah, Commissioner, um, I, I
11 want, I want to go back, um, on, on my questions
12 regarding capital dollars. Um, in fiscal year 2019 I
13 allocated funding for an emergency, ah, command
14 station for Crotona Park. Um, there was a back-and-
15 forth, ah, um, with your agency and then in December
16 of 2019 I was informed by the assistant commissioner,
17 I have it documented, it told me that DCAS has given
18 the approval to purchase this vehicle. Now, if DCAS
19 gave the approval to purchase it, that means OMB gave
20 them the approval. Therefore, this vehicle should
21 have been purchased. Can you please, can, I don't
22 know if there's someone there from the Capital
23 Division, can they explain to me why this vehicle has
24 not been purchased if DCAS gave the green light pre-
25 COVID?

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2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Ah, I don't know if
3 Commissioner Braddick can answer, I don't know if
4 Commissioner Stark, I don't know the answer to your
5 question. Ah, I will get to the answer of someone on
6 this call because we were limited to the number of
7 commissioners that can speak. Ah, Commissioner
8 Braddick...

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Do you have a
10 commissioner that, that's in charge of capital?

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Um, capital, but in
12 terms of fleet, um, fleet is, is, is a different
13 commission.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: OK, all right.
15 Um, my other question is in regards to gardens, I
16 have quite a few gardens. I, I think I have a little
17 over two dozen gardens in my, in my council district,
18 um, and we allocate funding to the gardens. Um, and
19 something that I found interesting in some of the
20 gardens, and I know that are highly used, um, they
21 order Port-A-Potties. And I've allocated funding for
22 this Port-A-Potties. Well, I was under the
23 impression that was allocating funding for these
24 Port-A-Potties. But it's my understanding, ah, that,
25 ah, the individuals in charge of the gardens were

1
2 being charged for the Port-A-Potties. Um, and I
3 wanted to know if you can, ah, if you can possibly
4 explain why our, ah, individuals who are taking care
5 of the gardens are being charged by the Parks
6 Department for Port-A-Potties.

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'm gonna, ah, ask,
8 ah, Matt Drury to respond to that question.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: That's the
10 [inaudible] who's, who's, um, who's, ah, requiring
11 them to pay for Port-A-Potties.

12 DIRECTOR DRURY: Yeah, hi, ah, thank you,
13 Council Member. I think you were referring to ah,
14 ah, a discretionary allocation award made and, and I,
15 my, my recollection was that, ah, and I'm happy to
16 double back and check the exact award, um, 'cause I'm
17 not familiar if it was this fiscal year or a previous
18 fiscal year. I know you've made similar allocations
19 like that in the past, and the way it generally works
20 is that your allocation goes to a, a third-party
21 organization, you know, a nonprofit, that, you know,
22 has activity within the parks, ah, and then, you
23 know, sometimes makes purchases, ah, rentals, if you
24 will. Ah, but I don't believe there should be any
25 personal obligation of the actual garden members

1 themselves. You know, I, I think the, the rental
2 should be administered either through the agency,
3 that's one way to do it, ah, or, or through a third-
4 party organization through, through the council's,
5 ah, discretionary award, ah, system.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Well, I highly
8 recommend that you look into this through GreenThumb,
9 because it's my, I know for a fact, and I found this
10 out recently and I was really taken aback by it, that
11 GreenThumb was charging, ah, the individuals who were
12 registered as being in charge of gardens for paying
13 out-of-pocket for these Port-A-Potties. And, um,
14 that shouldn't be happening.

15 DIRECTOR DRURY: And, and just a quick, a
16 quick clarification, because of the way the, the
17 council's award process works [inaudible] was offered
18 an award. That award does need to be front-loaded,
19 if you will. It's a reimbursement-based systems.
20 But I, but that shouldn't [inaudible] it may be that
21 the organization that received the award has to
22 front, you know, front those expenses. That's,
23 that's quite common with, in fact, I believe that's
24 the fundamental way in which the council
25 discretionary awards work. But we'll absolutely, you

2 know, we'll get the information from your office and,
3 and look into this and make sure that, it seems odd
4 that individuals would be asked to, you know, pay or,
5 you know, ah, that seems like [inaudible].

6 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: All right.

7 Well, I look forward to hearing from you as soon as
8 next week now that the good weather is upon us and,
9 you know, garden work has begun. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Council

11 Member Salamanca.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you, Mr.

13 Chair. Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next

15 is...

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Ah, so, we have one

17 more? OK.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, Council Member.

19 Ah, next up is Council Member Holden, I believe he
20 has a question.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Um, thank you,

23 Chair. Um, the, you know, the hearing on,

24 Commissioner, the hearing on the historic houses,

25 which we, the first one we had in five years, was

1 back in November. And there were very serious, um,
2 questions, ah, from the, the people, ah, who run the
3 historic houses about the maintenance. And, and the
4 chair asked a question about has that been addressed,
5 or has that position been filled, and the answer was
6 we're looking at this, ah, globally looking at this.
7 That's unacceptable to me, that four months have gone
8 by and these historic houses are many times putting
9 off vital maintenance that can, can hurt the
10 structure of the, of the house and the operation of
11 the house, and actually cost more money in the long
12 run, that that has not been addressed in four months
13 since our hearing. It's like what are we wasting our
14 time on here, on hearings, if things are not going to
15 be addressed, and, and to come up with, ah, with, ah,
16 we're globally looking at this is just bureaucratic
17 mumbo-jumbo, and I'm sick of it. I'm sick of the,
18 I'm sick of going, you know, for months, four months,
19 when we get nothing done. That's, that, that answer
20 should have been forthcoming. It should have been
21 here's what we're doing, and the fact that it's not
22 happening is scary, is scary, and, and, and I, we're
23 gonna have to have another hearing, Chair, if they
24 can't answer your simple questions about a position.
25

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2 So I'm outraged. I'm also, I wanted to, um, just
3 piggy-back on what, ah, Council Member Salamanca said
4 about the capital budget, because it goes into this
5 vast, ah, ah, void in Parks. And I, I am seriously
6 consider not funding any more capital projects in
7 Parks. I know you've done some great things,
8 Commissioner, but still, we're, we're into,
9 everything keeps going up and up, it doubles and
10 triples in price, and it's not even like in it realm
11 of, of really correct prices for the City of New
12 York. We're getting, like I said before, on the, um,
13 the tree planting, \$3400, and just a few years ago it
14 was half that. And just a couple years before that
15 it was a quarter of that. So prices, we have to do
16 it, we have to do a hearing, it looks like, in the
17 council, um, on out, out of control costs and why
18 these costs are so ridiculous in capital in Parks.
19 And why it costs \$3400 to, to plant a tree, ah, in
20 the City of New York when it used to cost, I remember
21 years ago \$400. I don't get it.

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, ah, Council
23 Member, number one, after the hearing, even you and I
24 had a conversation and I met with my leadership team
25 specifically to follow up on some key items. There

1 was a question specifically about a position. We're
2 in a hiring freeze, ah, but we met right after,
3 raised the concerns from that historic house trust
4 hearing, and there was some follow-up as a result of
5 the concern you and others have raised. So I know
6 for a fact that that did happen.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yes, four months
9 ago.

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right. We're in a
11 hiring freeze. We're in a hiring freeze so we...

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: You know, well,
13 historic, historic houses is, is a not-for-profit.
14 They could also raise the money.

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It [inaudible].

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And they, they
17 could pay for it out of their budget. It's not, it's
18 not out of the realm of possibility, I guess.

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, there were
20 some concerns expressed, ah, that came out at the
21 hearing and we did follow up to address them. In
22 terms of the budget prices, ah, under my tenure, like
23 I said, I am very proud of what we were able to do.
24 Our reforms, well, possibly yes. In terms of costs,
25 I want to be very clear, Park does not say to the

1 contractor no, don't pay \$2500, raise the price up to
2 \$3400 for a tree. We go out to the market and try to
3 get the best price possible. We have two options.
4 We accept their price or we don't do the work. This
5 is subject to the market and if we're gonna have a
6 hearing I would encourage you bring in the building
7 industry to find out why these prices so high. We
8 work with them, the construction industry are our
9 partners. Ah, we would like to get the lowest prices
10 possible. I take no pleasure turning around and
11 saying this is what comfort station would cost. I
12 would love it if a comfort station would cost a
13 million dollars. So there's no intent, what Parks is
14 saying we're out to waste to taxpayers' money, no, we
15 want to make sure we buy something the public will
16 enjoy. We put it out to the market. We get three,
17 four, five bids. We take the lowest responsible
18 bidder and then we go out, go forward, and start
19 working with them. So I always struggle with this.
20 Sometimes blaming Parks is like blaming, you know,
21 the homeowner for getting a high price from a
22 contractor to remodel the kitchen. We're subject to
23 the market and we will continue to find ways to
24 streamline the process. We're doing standard design
25

1
2 for compensation and that has been able for us to
3 fall the prices down and not escalate it if we were
4 doing a customized design of our comfort stations and
5 our playgrounds.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: But Commissioner,
8 Commissioner, I think we have to go even further here
9 as to why, um, these bids, why contractors are
10 raising their prices because essentially, and I've
11 heard this from several contractors, they don't want
12 to do business with the city because payment is very,
13 very slow, ah, the job is changed midway multiple
14 times, um, the specs are wrong, things are wrong. So
15 I think we need a bigger examination and
16 investigation as to why contractors are holding the
17 city hostage, ah, and, and, and I'd like to know what
18 it costs to plant a tree, ah, in New Jersey parks.
19 Ah, I'd, I'd like to know some comparison is why New
20 York taxpayers are getting soaked, because if, if you
21 think, and, and you even said \$3400 is too much. Ah,
22 if, if it is too much then we need an investigation,
23 ah, as to why it's so much more costlier in New York
24 City to plant a tree than across, ah, the Hudson
25 River.

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Ah, I would welcome
3 that conversation. We had a hearing many years ago
4 about the capital process and so I certainly would
5 welcome that hearing. Ah, in terms of our
6 contractors, we have over 640, so the contract
7 community, ah, wants to do business with the city.
8 Over 640 capital projects as of right now, ah, and in
9 terms of change orders, I reduced it by 50% to 70%
10 over my tenure. So we have addressed the changes, so
11 a lot of what I hear is prior to me getting here, but
12 as the urban myth goes it carries forward, ah, but,
13 ah, I want to stand up and say how proud I am about
14 what we were able to do in this agency. Things have
15 changed.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Well, well,
17 Commissioner...

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There's no way I
19 would have been able to complete...

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Commissioner,
21 with all due respect...

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK, yeah.

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: ...to projects...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Commissioner,
25 with all due respect, I have gotten so few trees

1
2 planted in my district under, this is the worst it's
3 been since I've been associated with community and
4 parks for over 40 years. I've never seen so few
5 trees being planted in my district. And I, and I
6 want some answers. I'm funding, ah, ah, additional,
7 I'm putting money, ah, from my budget into tree,
8 tree, ah, pruning because I can't get that done. So
9 I understand there's a budget crunch, but way before
10 the, the pandemic we were dealing with this, ah, tree
11 problem, and it's not getting solved it seems. Thank
12 you. Thank you, Chair.

13 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Council
14 Member Holden, yeah. So just to clarify, our hearing
15 on historic houses was actually the first in 15
16 years. The last one was held in 2005, yeah. Thank
17 you. Ah, now, Commissioner, I [inaudible] answer a
18 few questions on the capital side. Ah, as part of
19 the budget agreement which between the mayor and the
20 City Council the fiscal 2021 adopted budget redirects
21 428 million dollars in capital funds from NYPD to the
22 Parks Department in fiscal 2021 through 2023 for the
23 renovation of recreation and nature centers citywide.
24 So can you please update the committee on how and
25 where this funding has been invested?

1
2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Ah, Deputy
3 Commissioner, ah, Nelson, I don't know if you have an
4 update on that?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Hi. Um, so
6 several projects are moving forward with that
7 funding. Um, Shirley Chisholm Rec Center in Brooklyn
8 is one of them. Um, the second one is the North
9 Shore Recreation Center, which will also be a new
10 recreation center, is moving forward with that
11 funding, um, and Roy Wilkins was allocated 92 million
12 dollars, ah, out of that funding. The rest of the
13 funding we're still, um, in negotiation, um, and
14 discussion with OMB and City Hall as the best use of
15 the funding. As you recall, um, the mayor's State of
16 the City in 2020 talked about, ah, adding additional
17 recreation centers, but then COVID hit and so, you
18 know, I think we need to adjust to the new realities
19 in terms of our fiscal situation, so that's been on
20 pause. And I don't know if, ah, Deputy Commissioner
21 Braddick wants to add anything to that, but we're
22 very excited to have that funding, um, to expand and
23 enhance our recreational facilities for New Yorkers.

24 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So in addition to the
25 428 million dollars redirected from NYPD the mayor

1
2 added 65 million dollars in fiscal 2021 for other
3 Parks related projects, including when Cortlandt
4 House Museum renovation, Keith Williams Park,
5 Riverside Park renovation, Marine Park Oval, and
6 Citywide Community Gardens. So what is the status of
7 this funding and has any of the projects commenced,
8 ah, construction?

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, let me first
10 answer the tough part, ah, about some of those
11 specifically. If those capital funds were authorized
12 everything was placed on pause, ah, and then they
13 were phased into start, restarting. Ah, so all of
14 those most likely were paused or it may have started
15 design. I will defer to Commissioner Braddick to see
16 if she has any update, ah, but typically it's about
17 10 months for design, 10 months for procurement, and
18 then it goes on to construction. So if those
19 projects did move forward it was very likely paused
20 and it's just going to be unpaused by the end of this
21 month. Commissioner Braddick?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: Yes, thank
23 you, um, Commissioner, and Council Member Koo for
24 your question. Um, the Commissioner is, is correct
25 that, ah, those projects, ah, based on when the

1
2 funding came in were actually then placed on, paused
3 a year ago. Um, I know, I can tell you at least one,
4 ah, which was Marine Park, that one was, ah, started
5 in design. Ah, we're very fortunate that we have a
6 robust in-house design program and so for projects
7 that could be, ah, started with those, um, ah,
8 current, ah, designers already on staff they, they
9 were able to continue. I am not sure off the top of
10 my head of the others, but I'm happy to get back to
11 you with, with that information.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK, please get back to
13 us, yeah. Thank you. So how much has, ah, how much
14 is, how much has been used or allocated of the 428
15 million dollars, assuming that we get the full
16 amount, how much is still unallocated?

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I want to be clear
18 by your question. When it comes to Shirley Chisholm
19 that is a design build. Ah, so the projects moving
20 forward, the first phase is design, then procurement,
21 and then construction. On average it takes about two
22 years or so, ah, or plus before you get to
23 construction. So if the money is allocated, ah, you
24 start spending it if there are design services for
25 those design services until you get to construction.

1
2 So the projects are now proceeding but in the case of
3 Shirley Chisholm that's DDC, because that one was a
4 design build. So while the funds are within Parks,
5 ah, our partner agency is the one that is proceeding
6 and we're taking advantage of the new design build
7 that was authorized about two years ago.

8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Ah, OK, yeah. So the
9 fiscal 2021 adopted budget includes 138 million
10 dollars in city capital funding for 104 is
11 questionably projects within the Parks, ah,
12 Department citywide. What percent of the fiscal 2021
13 council-funded project, projects, are in design phase
14 or construction?

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'm not sure,
16 Council Member, where the 138 million number comes
17 from, but I can tell you on average, usually we have
18 about 640, 50 projects. It's typically a third in
19 design, a third in procurement, and a third in
20 construction. That's the rule of thumb we generally
21 use. So if you look at our entire capital budget
22 that's where most of the projects land. Ah, a lot of
23 the construction projects are moving forward and
24 again I want to reiterate, ah, that we have a close
25 to a 80% to 9%, um, completion on time and in fact

1
2 we're getting more and more projects completed early
3 before COVID. Ah, and in some cases even during
4 COVID. Ah, right now we're having challenges with
5 the procurement process because so many have been
6 paused and we're strategically figuring out how do we
7 start moving them forward, but, again, let me
8 reiterate it. It's about a third in design, a third
9 procurement, and a third in construction.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So how much funding is
11 allocated for Shirley Chisholm and the other parks?

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'll defer to
13 Commissioner Nelson. I don't know the number off the
14 top of my head. I don't want to get it wrong...

15 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: ...but, ah,
17 Commissioner Nelson.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, um, so
19 we're still working with DDC to come up with the
20 final number. Um, this was, ah, a project that
21 started out at a different site at 60 million
22 dollars. Um, it's moved to a new site at Nostrand
23 Playground, um, and at the, ah, request of the local
24 elected officials we're also adding a indoor pool, so
25 we're working with DDC, who will be doing this

1 project, to come up with that final number and that
2 will come out of the, that extra money that was, that
3 will need to be allocated to increase that project
4 from the original 60 million dollars will come out of
5 that 428. But it will be...

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON:

9 ...significantly more than the 60, so.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: I just want to, ah,
11 clarify with the commissioner. The 138 million
12 dollars is how much the council members allocated for
13 capital projects in fiscal 2021, yeah?

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I see, I see, OK.

15 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, so the same
17 remains. Ah, very often there's council money and
18 then there's mayoral money and sometimes [inaudible]
19 money to make a project whole. There are so many
20 across our entire portfolio that would be difficult
21 to answer. But the same answer applies. Ah, it's
22 about a third procurement, a third in construction,
23 and a third in design. So that number still holds.
24 Ah, as I said before, I know there's a lot, I'll be
25 very clear, there was a concern in the past about the

1
2 delay in capital projects. I will proudly say it,
3 I'll say it again and because I [inaudible] that is
4 no longer the case. We were able to, we inherited
5 130 [inaudible] projects. 101 of them are now
6 completed. Our track record right now is
7 outstanding. We reduced the process, completed over
8 800 projects, and so, ah, I'll be here another three
9 months or so. Ah, we're committed to keep moving
10 those projects forward now that it's unpaused. Those
11 are in construction, the construction industry is
12 delighted. Our M/WBEs are delighted. Ah, and so the
13 public will start seeing more of those projects
14 opening up this spring, this summer, and, ah, moving
15 forward.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah, thank you. So
17 because I heard so many council members, they are
18 frustrated and upset about their projects not moving
19 forward, like Salamanca and other ones, right?

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So [inaudible]...

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We will follow up
23 with Salamanca, but they have to also understand we
24 had a pause. Ah, back in March everything stopped,
25 construction, procurement, design, and so our team

1
2 worked with OMB to start releasing those that were
3 life safety type projects first. They were rolling
4 permissions to start unpausing projects and now all
5 of the projects will be unpaused as, close to 400
6 will be unpaused and to start. So we feel the same
7 pain. We just were at a standstill, ah, because of
8 the budget crisis.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. So the
10 mayor recently announced commitment of 17 billion
11 dollars in capital spending. How much of that money
12 is going to the parks?

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There is about, ah,
14 the East River Esplanade and the 107th Street Pier,
15 which is something we've been advocating for a very
16 long time, as long as I've been here, ah, has been
17 authorized as part of that package. Um, I'm trying
18 to get you the exact number. 284 million dollars,
19 ah, to do the critical repairs to the East River
20 Esplanade, phase 4, and Pier 107, which is in
21 serious, serious state of disrepair, and portions of
22 that esplanade are actually just closed. So it's 284
23 million, ah, for this capital budget.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. Ah, how much Parks
3 projects, how many Parks projects will be included
4 and has Parks been given?

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Um, I'm unclear
6 about the question. How many?

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So how many Parks
8 projects will be included?

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, right now...

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Like capital spending?

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We have our 10-year
12 capital plan, but in terms of this budget, ah, for
13 now, in terms of the preliminary budget it's the East
14 River plan phase 4 and Pier 107 I just mentioned for
15 284 million. That is the recommendation at this
16 point, ah, for the fiscal year 2022 capital budget
17 for Parks.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. So my last
19 question is so can you please give us the status of
20 all City Council-funded projects in fiscal 2021,
21 yeah?

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We can. My borough
23 commissioners meet with the council members on a
24 regular basis to give an update. Ah, certainly any
25 council member that would like that update we do it

1
2 so we have a tracking system. Ah, I'm not asking,
3 ah, the council members to do this, but I'm letting
4 the public know, those that are watching, they could
5 always go to our capital tracker. Ah, it is a very
6 transparent, ah, website that they can check the
7 status of the project, but we always offer a council
8 member an up-to-date project [inaudible] project, ah,
9 where it stands, and so I offer that you and I offer
10 that to all the council members should they want to
11 know.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So they have been given
13 instructions, ah, or guidelines on how to we start,
14 right?

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We, we have been,
18 yes, ah, OMB gave us permission to unpause the rest
19 of the projects that have been on pause. OMB has
20 given us permission during the pandemic. They
21 unpaused, ah, tranches of projects, ah, and now as of
22 the beginning of this money they're unpasing all the
23 remaining projects.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So can you give us the
3 full list of citywide, ah, where City Council
4 members, ah, funded projects, ah, right now, yeah?

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Not at this moment,
6 it'd be a quite a lot.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah, I know.

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We can...

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: You can communicate
10 [inaudible].

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, the answer is
12 we can get you that spreadsheet so you see all the
13 council-funded projects, yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you,
15 Commissioner, yeah. Ah, I finished all my questions.
16 If we have further questions we will communicate with
17 you in an email, yeah.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: All right. Thank
19 you very much.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. I want to
21 also thank you, you for your service. My other
22 council members already said, you are a gentleman and
23 you are a scholar, you know, we really like you a
24 lot. You are very, nice, very dedicated public
25

1
2 servant. I wish we had more of you in our
3 administration, yeah.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you, Chairman
5 Koo, and I just want to say I know council members
6 are tough. I didn't expect any different today. Ah,
7 but I know you all care deeply about the park system,
8 care about your constituents, and so I never take it
9 personally. Ah, I just want to just thank my staff
10 and the park workers [inaudible] during COVID. Ah, I
11 was moved and amazed by how committed and dedicated
12 they are. I always want to create a culture of both
13 caring and respect, which I why I believe I had such
14 a great relationship with all of the unions, because
15 we shared, ah, that with our employees. So I want to
16 thank you, and I do you know you have to move now to
17 the next, ah, round of those that will be testifying.
18 So thank you, Chairman Koo. I look forward to
19 working with you in my remaining few months.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah, thank you, you
21 and your staff. Wonderful service to the citizens of
22 New York.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair.

24 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Mr. Sartori, yeah.
25

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, thank you,
3 Chair Koo. Oh, I'm sorry.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Before we, yeah, before
5 we go to public participations can we take a break of
6 like five minutes, yeah?

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ah, yes, I think we
8 can recess for, ah, five minutes.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah, please, yeah.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: OK. Very well.
11 Please, after the five minutes we will restart with
12 testimony from members of the public.

13 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: OK, we are about
15 ready to restart. Ah, I will start calling up
16 panelists from the public who have registered to
17 testify. Before I do so I'd just like to go over a
18 few instructions. Ah, we'd like to remind everyone
19 that unlike our typical council hearings we'll be
20 calling on individuals one by one to testify. As I
21 stated earlier, each panelist will be given two
22 minutes to speak, so please begin once the Sergeant
23 at Arms has started the timer and given you the cue
24 to begin. Council members who have questions for a
25 particular panelist should use the raise hand

1 function in Zoom and I will call on you after the
2 panelist has completed their testimony. For
3 panelists, once your name is called a member of our
4 staff will unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms will
5 give you the go ahead to begin upon setting the
6 timer, so please wait for the sergeant to announce
7 that you may begin before delivering your testimony.
8 At this point I'd like to invite Adam Ganser to
9 testify. He will be followed by Heather Lubov.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

12 ADAM GANSER: Can you hear me?

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: We hear you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

15 ADAM GANSER: Great. My name is Adam
16 Ganser and I'm the executive director of New Yorkers
17 for Parks. We are the founding member of the Play
18 Fair Coalition, which includes over 300
19 organizations, many of whom will testify today. I
20 want to thank Chair Koo and the committees for the
21 opportunity to speak today. We are here to call on
22 the mayor and the City Council to play fair now and
23 to restore Parks funding. The preliminary budget
24 does not fully fund the positions that were lost. We
25 don't need half measures or percentages of the whole.

1 Restoring 79.8 million dollars, as outlined in our
2 submitted testimony, is critical to make sure our
3 city's parks are safe, clean, and accessible for all
4 New Yorkers. During the last 12 months our parks
5 have supported our physical and mental health. They
6 have been the only place we can visit with friends
7 and family outside of our home and where our children
8 can find unfettered joy and hope. Yet we have been
9 forced to do this in parks that have felt unsafe,
10 unmaintained, and strewn with trash. This didn't
11 need to happen. Mayor de Blasio dealt the Parks
12 Department a crushing blow in 2020, cutting the, ah,
13 Parks budget by 14%. That was 84 million dollars, a
14 rounding error in our city's budget, but crippling
15 for our Parks Department. Parks should be drivers of
16 equity. Unfortunately, these cuts have had the most
17 severe impacts on those very communities that have
18 been hardest hit by the pandemic. The budget is a
19 statement of our city's priorities. Our parks have
20 been woefully underfunded for decades. COVID did not
21 create this problem, but it has brought it to a
22 boiling point. With spring just around the corner,
23 let's make sure the city's budget reflects our
24 commitment to equity and the urgency of our parks and
25

1
2 open space needs. We look forward to working with
3 the council to play fair now for our parks budget.
4 Thank you very much.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Council
7 Member Holden does have a question.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you. Thank
9 you so much for your testimony and, um, you're right.
10 Ah, even in the best of times, ah, our parks weren't
11 funded properly and, ah, you know, I've been around,
12 ah, dealing with parks for over 40 years and I've
13 seen it first-hand that we've never gotten enough.
14 We never got enough for capital. We never got enough
15 for maintenance, and we certainly never got enough
16 for security and, and protecting our investment. And
17 the crushing blow that you mentioned, it was just
18 that, especially coming out of a pandemic. Ah, we
19 need our parks and we need them to operate obviously
20 with the best, ah, facilities, ah, the most, um, um,
21 advanced technology that we can offer and still we're
22 not doing that. Um, in fact, you know, heard the,
23 ah, I think if you heard the commissioner, ah, or of,
24 um, Parks say that we're, we only can keep the
25 bathrooms open till 3:00 p.m. in early spring.

1
2 That's ridiculous. So I want to thank you for your,
3 um, your, your testimony and, um, certainly, ah, I
4 think the next mayor has to really fund Parks fully,
5 um, if we are to be, um, you know, the, the great
6 city that we're supposed to be. Thank you so much.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up
8 is Heather Lubov, who will be followed by Lynn Kelly.

9 HEATHER LUBOV: Thank you. Ah, I'm
10 Heather Lubov. I'm the executive director of City
11 Parks Foundation, and we are a nonprofit organization
12 that leads free sports, arts, and environmental
13 education programs, and we also co-manage
14 partnerships with Parks, which is a joint program
15 with New York City Parks. All of our programs
16 encourage New Yorkers to use and care for their
17 neighborhood parks. Um, as you all know and as
18 you've heard from the commissioner, this, over this
19 last year the Parks Department has been relying
20 significantly on volunteers as green responders to
21 help with litter removal, with planting, and with
22 caring for parks. An astounding 584 individual
23 service projects were led by more than 7000
24 volunteers, and they were quickly mobilized in this
25 last year because of the existing network that exists

1 of nearly 600 stewardship groups in all 51 council
2 districts that Partnerships for Parks has cultivated
3 for many years. The city's budget cuts are having a
4 detrimental impact on this effort. We've lost 15% of
5 our outreach positions, making it extremely difficult
6 to serve all communities equitably exactly at the
7 time when we're relying so heavily on stewardship
8 groups in under-resourced neighborhoods. The
9 council's own visionary Parks Equity Initiative is
10 also integral to this network by funding training,
11 micro grants, volunteer supplies, and group
12 development activities that sustain groups now and
13 into the future. So in the short term we stand as a
14 proud member of the Play Fair Coalition and we call
15 on the city to recognize parks as the essential
16 infrastructure that they are by restoring both parks
17 budget and Parks Equity Initiative cuts and an end to
18 the hiring freeze. To address long-standing
19 inequities, we must rethink the planning and
20 maintenance of our city's parks and open spaces as a
21 comprehensive network and recognize that they are key
22 elements in supporting health, safety, economic, and
23 environmental issues. On a lighter note, as health
24
25

2 conditions continue to improve we fully expect to
3 restart...

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 HEATHER LUBOV: ...Summer Stage and other
6 free cultural performances and expand our programs
7 this summer. We look forward to working with the
8 council and the administration on all of these
9 efforts. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Heather.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

12 Next is Lynn Kelly, followed by Dilcy Benn.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

14 LYNN KELLY: Hi, good afternoon. I'm
15 Lynn Kelly. Thank you to the members of the council
16 and especially, ah, Parks committee chair, Council
17 Member Koo, for your leadership and support. It's
18 nice to see you again. Ah, I'm the director,
19 executive director of New York Restoration Project,
20 and for 25 years we've planted trees, renovated
21 gardens, restored parks, and transformed open space
22 in communities all throughout New York City. We
23 often bring private resources to spaces that lack,
24 um, municipal support and we're fortifying the city's
25 aging infrastructure in this way. Ah, this year

1 especially our gardens produced over 90,000 pounds of
2 fresh and free produce to New York City. As you've
3 heard from my colleagues, COVID-19 didn't cause the
4 issue that we have here today with the under-
5 resourcing of parks. But it certainly underscored
6 the inequities, ah, and has made it more challenging
7 for all of us as organizations operating and
8 stewarding parkland. Um, NYRP is not immune to the
9 impact of the city's austerity measures. We've
10 suffered a dramatic increase of nearly 80% in our
11 public funding, and that's resulted in a direct loss
12 of staff and programming. While this is serious, ah,
13 NYRP will bounce back. But I want you to think for a
14 minute. Imagine the impact of an 80% public funding
15 loss to some of the smaller organizations that, ah,
16 the both the council and the administration fund.
17 They're doing yeoman's work in neighborhoods that
18 simply don't have that kind of infrastructure or
19 support, and that's an enormous cut to them. As the
20 representative of the only citywide land conservancy,
21 we operate in all five boroughs and specific in
22 under-resourced neighborhoods. I'm here to tell you,
23 and I think you know this, the system is not working.
24 Urban green space is a, it's not a luxury, it's a

1
2 necessity. Ah, and we're asking here as a proud
3 member of the Play Fair Now Coalition for the city to
4 restore the parks budget and release the 1 billion
5 dollars of frozen capital funds in order to protect
6 our communities and support...

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 LYNN KELLY: ...our city's future. Thank
9 you.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Lynn.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up
12 is Dilcy Benn, followed by Joe Puleo.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

14 DILCY BENN: Good afternoon, Chair Koo
15 and members of the Bronx committee. Thank you for
16 providing me the opportunity to testify. My name is
17 Dilcy Benn. And I'm the president of Local 1505,
18 representing close to 1000 city park workers, also
19 referred to as CPWs. Primarily in the New York City,
20 um, Parks and Recreation Department, my members work
21 in all five boroughs, conducting maintenance in all
22 city parks. I would like to thank the speaker, City
23 Council, and mayor for baselining the 100 CPWs that
24 we are, we've been fighting for the last seven years.
25 Furthermore, we are thankful for an additional 100

1 CPWs added by the speaker and City Council in fiscal
2 year 2020. I come before you today to urge the
3 administration to baseline these additional 100 CPW
4 positions so these New Yorkers do not have to worry
5 every year whether or not they will have a job. And
6 I've heard from various groups how baselining CPWs
7 and adding more have improved the condition of many
8 parks throughout the city. We have come so far and
9 need to keep this train going. Why go backwards? My
10 members are out there in all five boroughs helping
11 maintain our parks that are enjoyed by all New
12 Yorkers and visitors. Furthermore, our members make
13 \$15.48 to start, and it's becoming increasingly
14 difficult to live and raise a family in the city.
15 The city must take a long, hard look at how it can
16 take care of its workforce. As we approach the start
17 of spring in the next few weeks there's a lot of work
18 to be done to prepare the parks and ball field for
19 the millions of people who will be taking strolls and
20 enjoying our warmer weather in the parks. The
21 beautification of parks is important to all New
22 Yorkers as well as the thousands of tourists who
23 visit these areas. Once again, I would like to thank
24 the, I would like thank Speaker Johnson, the City
25

1 Council, and the mayor for baselining my workers, but
2 we need to continue to work and urge baselining of
3 additional 100, um, CPWs in the fiscal year 2020. In
4 closing, I would also like to wish Commissioner
5 Silver well and would like to thank David Stark for
6 all the work that he's done for my members during,
7 ah, and the members of DC37. Um, thank you for the
8 opportunity to testify before you today. And I will
9 be happy to take any questions if you have any.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

12 Next is Joe Puleo, followed by Marlena Giga.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

14 JOE PULEO: Ah, good afternoon, City
15 Council people. Good afternoon, Chair Koo and the
16 rest of the City Council. Um, I'd like to take a
17 moment to, um, wish Commissioner Silvers, um, well in
18 his future endeavors. Ah, thank you for your
19 service. It's been much appreciated. Thank you for
20 bringing in, ah, your history of planning, ah, to the
21 Parks Department. OK, I'd like to begin by stating
22 that this Parks budget is crucial. Ah, we need to
23 not only restore, we need to expand what we've lost.
24 Ah, last year for the first time since 1992 we had
25 layoffs. We had 50 Urban Park Rangers laid off at a

1
2 time when they were needed the most during a
3 pandemic. Now what these Urban Park Rangers did was
4 had these pop-up programs near these park houses
5 where they would teach kids, ah, about the park.
6 They would teach them about ecology, history, and
7 they also taught kids on how to use masks during
8 COVID. They were rewarded with layoff notices. We
9 would like to see them all restored. We would like
10 to see, ah.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I believe we may have
12 lost Mr. Puleo. Give us one second to try to deal
13 with that.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: This, ah, Chief
15 Sergeant at Arms. It appears he has dropped out from
16 the Zoom.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: OK, then we'll, we'll
18 proceed with the next person and if he's able to
19 rejoin at some point we can have him speak.

20 JOE PULEO: Sorry, am I, am I back on? I
21 apologize.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Oh, yeah.

23 JOE PULEO: My, my, my apologies for
24 that, for that technical. My apologies for that
25

1 technical glitch. I'm sorry about that, um. So what
2 I, what I would like to see.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Well, can we proceed to
5 the, another person?

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: It appears we lost
7 him again. We will move on to the next person. If
8 he is able to rejoin we will have him, ah, speak at
9 that point. So, ah, if Marlana Giga is available she
10 is up next and after her, if Mr. Puleo is not up by
11 then, ah, Carter Strickland will be up after that.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 MARLENA GIGA: Hi. My name is Marlana
14 Giga and I've been a PEP officer for 20 years, and
15 I've also been a union rep for Local 983 for the last
16 eight years. Um, I've personally seen the
17 devastation, ah, on many aspects that the budget cuts
18 have done. Um, the PEP officers and Rangers have
19 been cut to numbers where it's impossible for New
20 Yorkers to feel safe in the parks. Um, as we've
21 heard from several council members, um, people are
22 coming to the park to, to do drugs and to do illegal
23 activity, and the Parks Department is responsible
24 for, um, the activity, the illegal activity within
25 the parks. The NYPD, they are reactive, so they'll

1
2 respond after a situation takes place. But our
3 Rangers and PEP officers are the ones that are
4 actively patrolling. I want to make that clear, ah,
5 to everybody on this call. Um, and the Parks
6 Department, ah, playgrounds and parks have suffered
7 as well due to the lack of maintenance employees, um,
8 that are able to maintain the parks as well. The
9 city seasonal aides that did not get hired last year
10 suffered greatly. I, I can't even tell you the, the
11 amount of calls that we've received. The city
12 seasonal aides, they are the backbone for the Parks
13 Department. Parks Department depends on them, um,
14 for the seasonal budget to pick up the beaches and
15 the pools, um, for the staff that gets stepped up to
16 other locations as well. And the city seasonal aides
17 tend to be the older staff and the younger staff,
18 from one, um, spectrum to the other. And this is
19 their livelihood. And, and it was devastating, um,
20 that people were not getting called back for the
21 Parks Department. And, you know, they suffered and
22 the public suffered as well. So I urge you...

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

24 MARLENA GIGA: ...to restore [inaudible]
25 for the parks, um, and the Parks Department is the

1
2 face of New York City. And, and just one last thing,
3 \$3400 to plant a tree, we have maintenance workers
4 that can do this at a fraction of the cost. It
5 should not be outsourced. Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. It
7 appears that Joe Puleo was able to sign back on, but
8 before we return to him Council Member Holden does
9 have a question.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Great, OK, I'm
11 unmuted. Ah, thank you, thank you Marlena, um, for
12 your, ah, for your testimony. And Joe, I know
13 you're, you're out there in the field. I hope you're
14 not driving, but I think you're sitting in the car.
15 We can't hear him. But, um, ah, I just want to bring
16 up the, the whole, ah, PEP and the Urban Park
17 Rangers. Um, how many, Marlena, how many, ah, PEP
18 officers are we down, because I, I, I always said if
19 you quadruple the number it still wouldn't be enough
20 to, to deal with all the issues in Parks right now.

21 MARLENA GIGA: I mean, we're at the low
22 300s. That should be for one borough.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Exactly.

24 MARLENA GIGA: I mean, it's ludicrous.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah.

1
2 MARLENA GIGA: [inaudible] you have
3 people on leave, if there's special events, once the
4 summertime comes they get stepped up, they're
5 deployed to the beaches and, and the pools. You may
6 have two officers on patrol for the whole borough.
7 It's disgraceful.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Right, and
9 especially now with the, it seems to be some
10 lawlessness or, or just individuals that have now
11 descended on our parks for you name it. In fact, um,
12 on a nightly basis we have in my district and, and
13 surrounding areas these car clubs that have come in
14 with loudspeakers and they want to entertain the
15 whole borough with their so-called music, but we're
16 seeing that, um, almost on a nightly basis,
17 especially when the weather gets warmer. So we
18 really need PEP, ah, because without them, like you
19 said, the police are, are running to 911 calls. So
20 we really need and, and the PEP picks up the slack,
21 so Parks rangers we desperately need, and to cut
22 these programs or to cut these job descriptions and
23 our seasonal is just a crime. And, and, and I just
24 want to thank you and Joe, and I know Joe's got to go

1 on, so I'll let him, um, I think we finally got him
2 back. Thanks, Joe. Thanks, Marlana.

3
4 MARLENA GIGA: Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. And Joe
6 Puleo, you may restart. Thank you.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: TIME STARTS NOW.

8 JOE PULEO: OK, I'm sorry. My, my
9 apologies again. But, ah, thank, thank you, ah,
10 Councilman Holden. You're absolutely right. We need
11 more Parks enforcement officers. We need more Urban
12 Park Rangers. We need more city seasonal aides.
13 And, again, we can in-house this work that you talked
14 about with these trees. We have gardeners. We have
15 associate park service workers. We have city park
16 workers that can do the task at a fractional of the
17 cost. Why are we relying and being held hostage by
18 contractors? It makes no sense. Ah, we, we, I mean,
19 these are long-overdue projects. We can do a lot of
20 stuff out there that contractors are doing at
21 overinflated prices. So, again, the last time, ah,
22 we met at City Council we were talking about
23 expansions, you know. Ah, everything looked great.
24 Unfortunately COVID hit and when people needed Parks
25 the most we had the least to offer, and it made

1 conditions, ah, almost unbearable. Ah, we, we, we
2 applaud all those people that volunteered at times to
3 come out and clean the parks, but that is not the
4 solution to this problem. The solution is hire more
5 park workers to do the job, especially now. Not
6 everybody has the luxury of going out to the Hamptons
7 to escape what's happening in the city. Most of us
8 have to rely on our parks and we need them the most,
9 and that's the only place that our children and our
10 seniors are going to have, you know, for green space.
11 Thank you all. I appreciate, ah, all of you for
12 giving me this time, and I hope we do the right thing
13 this year. Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Joe.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

17 Ah, next is Carter Strickland, who will be followed
18 by Christina Taylor.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time starts now.

20 CARTER STRICKLAND: OK, thank you. Um,
21 thank you, Chairperson Koo and members of the
22 committee. My name is Carter Strickland. I am the
23 New York State director of the Trust for Public Land.
24 We're a national nonprofit that creates parks and
25

1 protects land for people. Ah, I want to thank the
2 Parks Department for getting through a really
3 difficult year and thanking Mr. Silver, ah, in
4 particular for his service, um, for the people of New
5 York. Since the beginning of the pandemic parks and
6 open spaces have been critical gathering spaces for
7 New Yorkers and I will say in response to a recent
8 Nicholas Cristoff article it's one of the few
9 departments that's committed to providing any
10 bathrooms for New Yorkers. Um, after the pandemic
11 parks will continue to enhance property values and
12 boost economic development, um, support local jobs
13 and, ah, increase spending. Ah, I'm pleased to say
14 that the Trust for Public Land, thanks to the
15 generosity of private funders and the New York Green
16 Relief and Recovery Fund is launching a study of the
17 annual economic benefits of parks in New York City.
18 We hope to have that ready by the next budget season
19 for this council's, ah, ah, consideration.
20 Unfortunately, the FY22 preliminary budget, ah,
21 indicates that parks are even lower priority than
22 last year. Ah, I note that it's, ah, 0.57% of the
23 overall city budget compared to last year's 0.59%.
24 Ah, it doesn't go far enough to restore last year's
25

1 cuts. We're a proud member of the Play Fair Now
2 Coalition and urge the council to restore, ah, ah, 80
3 million dollars in the expense budget. Um, I do, we,
4 I'll be spending, submitting some longer testimony on
5 capital budget, but I do want to say, ah, on, the
6 council now could expand park access by restoring
7 custodial funding for community playgrounds. Um,
8 that has not kept pace with the funding that Council
9 Member, ah, council members have spent on our
10 partnership to create open, ah, community playgrounds
11 at schools. We need to keep them open. It's about
12 \$61,000 for the custodians to keep it open. There's
13 approximately 1.5 million dollars, ah, you know, to
14 keep open 28 playgrounds that are built and not open
15 because of, um, custodial funding cuts. So, ah, with
16 that, thank you, Council.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is
19 Christina Taylor, who will be followed by Carlos
20 Castell Croke.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 CHRISTINA TAYLOR: [inaudible]

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ms. Taylor, can you
24 pause for one second. There's some issues we're
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having with your mic or sound. Give us one second.
Can you restart now?

CHRISTINA TAYLOR: [inaudible]

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ah, sorry, it's
there, there might be an issue on your end. We're
getting a lot of feedback, um, sounding coming from
your, I think it's coming from your end.

CHRISTINA TAYLOR: [inaudible].

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ah, there's still
some distortions coming on.

CHRISTINA TAYLOR: OK, can I try, um,
maybe...

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: That's a little
bitter.

CHRISTINA TAYLOR: It's better?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: It's a bit better
now, yes.

CHRISTINA TAYLOR: OK. Let's hope it
will be OK.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Please go ahead.

CHRISTINA TAYLOR: All right, sorry about
that. Ah, good morning, I'm Christina Taylor,
director of programs and operations for the Van
Cortlandt Park Alliance. I've worked in Van

1
2 Cortlandt Park for 20 years but I've never seen a
3 summer like the summer of 2020. In early April I
4 went to Van Cortlandt Park for a social distance hike
5 on a day off. For my first big adventure outside I
6 picked a remote trail that is usually empty, but it
7 was full of people. This is when I realized what
8 kind of summer we were in for and I was right. As
9 the weather got warmer Van Cortlandt Park got busier,
10 just as the park was overtaken with more visitors
11 than ever before we learned about the 84 million
12 dollar budget cut to New York City Parks. With that
13 cut came the reality that there would be no seasonal
14 staff hired to maintain the park. New York City
15 Parks usually receives 1700 seasonal staff. Last
16 summer Van Cortlandt Park got none. And yet twice as
17 many people meant twice as much garbage, twice as
18 much damage to our infrastructure, twice as much wear
19 and tear to the fields and trails, all without as
20 many staff. You know, it wasn't Van Cortlandt Park,
21 it was happening in every park all the city. Van
22 Cortlandt Park Alliance stepped up and help. We
23 secured funding for six seasonal maintainers and we
24 hosted volunteer days. Parks staff worked endlessly.
25 They came at 5:00 a.m. daily to clean up the mess

1 from the night before. People worked through breaks
2 and late into the even. Honestly, I know how they
3 were standing at the end of the day. And here we are
4 a year later, bracing ourselves for the summer of
5 2021, which will be just as busy as last year, which
6 is why we need your support in increasing the Parks
7 Department budget to 1% of the city's overall budget.
8 Right now the Parks Department budget is only 0.5% of
9 the city's budget which is basically a rounding
10 error. We are asking now for 1% for Parks. Is that
11 too much to ask for an agency that serves 8 million
12 New Yorkers, providing equitable access to all?
13 Forcing New York City parks to go through another
14 summer with a greatly reduced number of seasonals and
15 no resources is just cruel. Not only has Parks staff
16 worked tirelessly and in most cases thanklessly.
17 Working with [inaudible] staff that have been hard
18 hit by the COVID-19 pandemic themselves, and yet they
19 persist, providing a clean and safe environment for
20 the public, who is so desperately need our parks.
21 Park workers are the unsung heroes of the pandemic.
22 By increasing the Parks budget to 1% of the city's
23 budget you have the opportunity to thank them for
24 their hard work and to provide cleaner, safer, and
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1
2 more welcoming green spaces for a city that
3 desperately needs it. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I believe
6 Council Member Holden did have a question either for
7 you, Christina, or a prior witness.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yes, ah, thank
9 you. My question, or statement, maybe both, ah, to
10 Carter Strickland from the Trust and Public Land. I
11 want to thank him for bringing up the school yards to
12 playground, um, program, which is stalled, ah,
13 because of the lack of custodial funding, which is a
14 very minor part of this. We've invested so much in
15 capital and yet that to break the promise, ah, that
16 we could provide more playgrounds for our, our kids
17 and, and everyone, seniors, everyone, but certainly
18 our children coming off of, ah, being, ah, you know,
19 obviously quarantined for almost a year now, um, is
20 criminal, that we're, that we're not even releasing
21 that or funding the custodial area of this, the
22 component. Um, so I want to thank you for bringing
23 it up. Even though that they, you know, the
24 administration tried to say that they're, they're
25 going to fix it. They haven't fixed it yet and it's,

1 and, and Carter, it's not that much money, right?

2 We're not talking about a great deal of money to fund
3 the custodial part of it. Can you unmute Carter
4 Strickland? Thanks, OK.

5
6 CARTER STRICKLAND: I'm unmuted now. No,
7 you know, our, our, we, there's 28 sites in the
8 pipeline, ah, Council Member Holden, ah, it's about a
9 million and a half dollars to open up 28 new
10 community playgrounds, um, you know, serving tens of
11 thousands of people.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Right, so it's
13 really, that part of it, ah, you're not talking about
14 much money, you know, relative to the whole city
15 budget, and we can open up so many parks, additional
16 parkland for everyone. So that, this needs to be a
17 priority of this administration and, ah, hopefully we
18 as council members could make this, um, you know, a,
19 a huge part of the, um, the negotiations in the
20 budget. Thank you. Thank you, Carter. Thanks for
21 all the great work you guys do. Thanks so much.
22 Thank you, Chair.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Yeah, I, I
24 have to concur with Council Member Holden that part
25 of the problem of custodian, though we have received

1
2 many complaints in our school, School 189, ah, we
3 have a nice playground build by Carter, but they
4 cannot use it due to custodian, um, problems. So we
5 want to ask the council, together we show solidarity,
6 ah, to tell DOE to open up those playgrounds, yeah.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair.

8 Next, ah, next person is Carlos Castell Croke, who
9 will be followed by Dan Clay.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 CARLOS CASTELL CROKE: Ah, good
12 afternoon. My name is Carlos Castell Croke and I'm
13 the associate for New York City Programs of the New
14 York League of Conservation Voters. NYLCV represents
15 over 30,000 members in New York City and we are
16 committed to advancing a sustainability agenda that
17 will make our people, our neighborhoods, and our
18 economy healthier and more resilient. I'd like to
19 thank Chair Koo and all the council members on the
20 committee for the opportunity to testify today.
21 NYLCV supports a fiscal year 2020, ah, sorry, 2022
22 budget, ah, that secures progress on many of the
23 environmental transportation and public health
24 priorities Mayor de Blasio has committed to in OneNYC
25 and beyond. Our city is on the precipice of the road

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2 to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and it is
3 incumbent upon our elected leaders to invest our tax
4 dollars in climate action and solutions as we rebound
5 from this crisis and not lose ground, especially with
6 the influx of relief funds that will flow from the
7 American Rescue Act package. New York City's
8 Department of Parks and Recreation plays a critical
9 role in this fight. Parks and green spaces are one
10 of the city's most valuable environmental assets, are
11 a major source of the city's urban canopy, which
12 mitigates climate change, provides clean air and
13 habitats for native wildlife, and contributes to the
14 well-being of our residents and economy. Preserving
15 these spaces is a top priority for NYLCV. The 2.6
16 million street and park trees that the Parks
17 Department is responsible for, remove 1300 tons of
18 pollutants from the atmosphere and store 1 million
19 tons of carbon each year. Trees are vital for making
20 urban [inaudible] effect and can lower temperatures
21 by up to nine degrees, cutting air conditioner use by
22 30% and reducing heat energy use by a further 20% to
23 5%. This is why NYLCV is proud to join with the New
24 Yorkers for Parks and DC37, again, is founding
25 members of the Play Fair for Parks campaigns. Parks

1
2 not only provide critical infrastructure that have
3 multiple environmental benefits, but they also offer
4 a place for New Yorkers to safely social distance,
5 exercise, and get much-needed fresh air. But over
6 the past year through the hardships of the pandemic,
7 we have see the cleanliness and safety of our parks
8 drop significantly due to unfair budgetary cuts to
9 staffing and programs. With the summer months
10 coming, Parks are positioned to see a sharp uptick in
11 usership after having been neglected for months.
12 That's why in the third year of our campaign we're
13 asking for the 78.9 million dollars, ah, in the
14 fiscal 2020, ah, Parks budget, um, which I will, ah,
15 outline all of our specific asks in, ah, the
16 testimony that I submit. Um, thank you for the
17 opportunity to testify today.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Kris, is
19 Mr. Carter still on? I, I forgot to ask him a
20 question.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I believe he might
22 have signed off, Council Member.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Oh.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: He doesn't appear to
25 be listed any longer.

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CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK, so, yeah.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: OK, we'll call the next person who is Dan Clay, who will be followed by Joanna Oltman Smith.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

DAN CLAY: Hi there, everybody, Dan Clay is my name. I'm a gardener for Parks, the one gardener in Prospect Park and Brooklyn and president of the, ah, Gardeners Local 1507 of the East 37. And first let me just say thanks to everybody here, everybody for your concern and your, your, ah, and your support, everybody from the City Council and Parks and Rec, and D37 especially, and, um, I just want, the two things I want to say is first of all hopefully everybody is appreciating nature and understanding that this, this major blow we've been dealt this year from nature, I'm talking about the virus, and, and the fact that nature's like one of the, one of the best things to help make things a, a little better, you know, the parks and, and they're, ah, and they're, ah, and people's, you know, people have the parks to visit while they're, ah, suffering and everything. And I hope also that everybody's on board with, ah, getting things back to normal and,

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2 and I want everybody to know that we, we just want
3 to, all of us gardeners and everybody, all the boots
4 on the ground in the parks, we want to get back to
5 doing some good work, and, um, hopefully things are
6 better soon. So, ah, thanks for, ah, ah, hosting the
7 events and, and, ah, thanks again for all your
8 supports.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is
11 Joanna Oltman Smith, followed by Emily Maxwell.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 JOANNA ALTMAN SMITH: Good. Um, my name
14 is Joanna Oltman Smith. I am testifying today as a
15 professional citizen, but I am a member of many of
16 the organizations that are on the Play Fair
17 Coalition. I serve on Community Board 6 in Brooklyn
18 as well on the Parks Committee and others, and I also
19 sit on Prospect Park's, ah, community committee. Ah,
20 this year more than ever New Yorkers loved our New
21 York City parks to death. This might sound like
22 hyperbole, but despite the valiant efforts of Parks
23 employees and dedicated volunteers, our parks have
24 suffered damage due to maintenance and operational
25 limitations, from which it will take years and major

1
2 reinvestments to recover. This simply is not a
3 fiscal approach to budgeting and that's what we're
4 here to discuss today. I'd like to share a couple of
5 examples from Prospect Park, which is my local park.
6 At the same time we celebrated major capital
7 projects, like the new entrances on Flatbush and the
8 restoration of Enddale Arch, gorgeous, another
9 popular entrance to the park at Garfield Place and
10 Prospect Park west has been severely neglected. The
11 rustic pathways that comprises entrance are often
12 impassable due to the lack of snow removal and muddy
13 conditions for much of the year, people eager to
14 access the Long Meadow and the Park drive have
15 compacted the soil and destroyed the landscape in a
16 wide radius around the approved pathways. Any
17 savings on maintenance has devastated the physical
18 integrity of the entire area. Similarly, the
19 decrease in PEP, um, we heard from other council
20 members about some things that are happening in other
21 parks, but it looks like in Prospect Park to not have
22 enough enforcement as the dog owners let their pets
23 off leash in our delicate and unique woodlands
24 ecosystems, damaging wildlife and flora, fauna, ah

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2 treasure hunters with metal detectors freely destroy
3 the long meadow and open camp figures are built.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 JOANNA OLTMAN SMITH: I see my time is a
6 running out, so I just wanted to emphasize that we
7 need to, um, we need to focus on restoring the
8 expense budget, um, back to full 79.8 million dollars
9 and that everything we invest in our open space, our
10 urban canopy, our nature areas, will be returned to
11 us manyfold in, ah, savings for public health and
12 environmental benefits. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thanks.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is
15 Emily Maxwell, followed by Anna Boatwright.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 EMILY MAXWELL: Hi, I'm Emily Maxwell.
18 I'm the director of the city's program for the Nature
19 Conservancy in New York, and we have over 35,000
20 members and supporters here in New York City. Um, I
21 don't want to reiterate all of the increased things
22 my colleagues have said I think it's clear that we're
23 all here to ask City Council to help ups play fair
24 for Parks, um, and the Nature Conservancy fully
25 supports that. I want to enumerate a few slightly

1 complimentary things because I know we're all here
2 with the same sort of mission. Um, so one of the
3 things I would like to emphasize is that New Yorkers
4 don't have equitable access to our parks and even if
5 people can access a park they may not feel that the
6 amenities or the cleanliness or their safety is the
7 same. And some recent research by the New School and
8 the Nature Conservancy and others really underscores
9 this, and particularly in some of our communities as
10 in Queens and Brooklyn that were hardest hit by COVID
11 we see people feeling that inequitable access. So
12 parks and our trees are a critical part of our COVID
13 recovery and I want to note that our budget for
14 trees, as underscored by some of the conversations
15 that have been taking place during this hearing is
16 the lowest it's been in about 16 years. That's
17 really scary. Our trees provide critical services
18 for New Yorkers, from cleaner air to cooler streets
19 to shade when we need to be outside on hot summer
20 days in the face of increasing heat, and having an
21 adequate budget for trees, both existing,
22 maintenance, and new is crucial for the future and
23 health of New Yorkers and for our economic recovery.
24 I'll also just highlight that nature-based jobs for
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2 New Yorkers more important than ever. We need
3 healthy, safe, well-paying jobs for folks to be
4 maintained in our city and improving quality of life
5 for others, and we also need to be provide support
6 for those who steward, many of the nonprofits who
7 steward our parks that compliment the work of the
8 city itself. Um, my longer testimony will be in
9 writing. I just want to underscore that increasing
10 and restoring the budget for New York City Parks and
11 our trees is really crucial for the city's recovery
12 and the Nature Conservancy is happy to be with you
13 all today. So thank you so much.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

15 Next is Anna Boatwright, followed by Sarah Charlop-
16 Powers.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

18 ANNA BOATWRIGHT: Hello. Um, thank you
19 for your time this afternoon. My name is Anna
20 Boatwright and I am a board member at the Fort Greene
21 Tennis Association, a nonprofit in Brooklyn. We have
22 over a thousand constituents, and we have raised over
23 \$100,000 over the past decade to help maintain the
24 tennis courts at Fort Greene Park. I'm here today to
25 talk about tennis in parks across the city and how

1 the Parks Department budget plays a vital role in
2 making the sport accessible to all New Yorkers. New
3 York City Parks provides access to nearly 600 tennis
4 courts. Tennis is a COVID-safe sport and has seen a
5 surge in a participation. In Fort Greene local
6 residents line up at sunrise in hopes to reserve one
7 hour of court time. From July through December last
8 year more than 7500 hours of tennis were played on
9 our six courts. Budget cuts meant that the tennis
10 courts did not have a park staff attendant who is
11 typically responsible for ensuring that the courts
12 are utilized in a fair and equitable manner. Our
13 volunteer association stepped in to help as much as
14 possible, but the combination of increased demand and
15 lack of Parks staff led to a reduction in equal
16 access to tennis. Similar patterns were true at
17 other park locations. According to Charles East,
18 head of the Lincoln Terrace Tennis Association,
19 Lincoln Terrace Park saw court usage until midnight
20 on a regular basis. Mark McIntyre, executive
21 director of the Riverside Clay Tennis Association in
22 Manhattan, reports his facility was in constant use
23 every court. However, because Parks provided no
24 attendant at the 119th Street Courts, many courts
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2 were occupied by the same players hour after hour and
3 so many others who wanted to play could not get on.
4 Daniel Carson of Astoria Park in Queens told us this
5 summer it was common to wait up to two hours or more
6 for an open court. The evidence is clear. People
7 are in dire need for regular participation and
8 healthy active outlets like tennis.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 ANNA BOATWRIGHT: Is my time up? Oh, I'm
11 sorry. Ah, with so many new players getting engaged
12 with the sport, demand will remain high for years to
13 come. Funding for parks needs to be rebuilt and
14 supported and the dramatic events of 2020 have only
15 made this more clear. Thank you for listening.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.
17 Next is Sarah Charlop-Powers, followed by Mike
18 Rezney.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

20 SARAH CHARLOP-POWERS: Um, hi, everyone.
21 My name is Sarah Charlop-Powers. I'm the executive
22 director of the Natural Areas Conservancy. And
23 thanks to Council Member Koo and the committee for
24 the opportunity to testify today. Our organization,
25 the Natural Areas Conservancy, works as a close

1 partner to the Parks Department to advance the
2 restoration and management of 10,000 acres, that's a
3 third of our city's park system, um, that are forest
4 and wetlands. A signature project of our
5 organization was the development with the agency of
6 the forest management framework for New York City,
7 which was released in 2018 and, and calls for the
8 comprehensive management of over 7000 acres of forest
9 land on city parks property and includes a detailed
10 set of metrics and a budget for the next 25 years.
11 We were thrilled in 2019 by the leadership of the
12 council and the mayor, which resulted in 43 million
13 dollars of expense funding, including 4 million
14 dollars to support the management of forested natural
15 areas. This funding was used to implement the first
16 year of recommendations of the forest management
17 framework and our colleagues at the Parks Department
18 were incredibly efficient with the use of these
19 funds. They employed 47 seasonal staff, planted over
20 20,000 trees and shrubs, engaged 2000 volunteers,
21 improved 40 miles of trails, and cared for over 900
22 acres of parkland in under 12 months using the
23 [inaudible] funding. The plight of our city's
24 natural areas has mirrored that of the full park
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2 system over this past year. Visitation to natural
3 areas increased 65% between 2019 and 2020, and at the
4 same time the agency's ability to care for this third
5 of the park's system has been drastically impacted
6 due to budget cuts and the loss of more than 50
7 seasonal staff. Another significant challenge is the
8 impact of the hiring freeze, which has left...

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 SARAH CHARLOP-POWERS: ...[inaudible]
11 positions and due for the past year. Um, we stand in
12 support of the play, Play Fair, calling for the
13 reinstatement of funds that were cut from the
14 agency's budget and look forward to working together
15 with our colleagues to care for parks in the year
16 ahead.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.
18 Our next speaker is Mike Rezny, followed by Amy
19 Harrison Thogmartin.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

21 MIKE REZNY: Hi, everyone. Ah, I'd like
22 to thank the Parks Committee for the opportunity to
23 speak today. Um, my name is Mike Rezny and I'm the
24 assistant director of Green Space at Grow NYC. Ah,
25 Grow NYC has one simple goal, to make our city more

1 sustainable and livable through an environmental
2 programming that empowers communities block by block.
3 Our work in New York City has increased access to
4 fresh, affordable food in underresourced communities,
5 built and revived open green spaces, diverted waste
6 from landfills, and educated the next generation of
7 environmental leaders. Grow NYC interacts with the
8 city's parks and parkland in two main ways. First,
9 many of our green market farmers' markets are hosted
10 on NYC Parks property. We are proud that the green
11 market locations remained open and serving residents
12 through the pandemic. This includes not just our
13 best-known markets like Union Square and [inaudible]
14 Plaza, there are green markets in Hope Park, Corona
15 Park, Wood Hill Park, and many more neighborhoods
16 through the city. The second way is through the
17 program that I run, Grow NYC green space program.
18 Since our founding in 1970 Grow NYC has built more
19 than 135 community gardens across New York City.
20 Later this year these garden projects will exceed 1
21 million square feet of open green space. In 2020 we
22 built 10 new gardens, in Brownsville, Bushwick,
23 Canarsie, Cypress Hills, East New York, Green Point,
24 Capitol Hill, Fordham Heights, Morrisania, and
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2 Jamaica. In addition to those 10 new gardens, Grow
3 NYC completed renovation projects at 30 additional
4 sites. The majority of this hard work takes place at
5 GreenThumb community gardens and we're incredibly
6 grateful for our partnership with the GreenThumb
7 team. In addition to these gardens, a meaningful
8 portion of the gardens will be built, have been built
9 in non-park spaces. A dozen gardens on NYCHA
10 property, several publicly accessible community
11 gardens on church property, and a community garden on
12 a landmark historic cemetery in Woodside. Searching
13 for nontraditional garden locations allows us to
14 reach more New Yorkers and to turn unused vacant land
15 into garden spaces designed alongside the community.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

17 MIKE RENZY: It allows Grow NYC to do
18 valuable work in council districts that do not
19 necessarily include GreenThumb community gardens. A
20 critical source of funding is discretionary funding,
21 including Parks Equity and a Greener NYC, and we
22 stand with the Play Fair Coalition and ask that these
23 programs to be restored. Thanks.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next
3 speaker is Amy Harrison Thogmartin, who will be
4 followed by Caroline Soussloff.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

6 AMY HARRISON THOGMARTIN: Thank you. Um,
7 thank you for the opportunity to speak today and for
8 your continued leadership. I am Amy Thogmartin and
9 serve on the board as the Marine Park Alliance, and
10 I'm providing this testimony on behalf of the
11 organization. At 798 acres, Marine Park is the
12 largest city property in Brooklyn. And as is true
13 and has been heard today from, ah, for all city
14 parks, use has dramatically increased during the
15 pandemic. We're delighted to see more people
16 discover our park, but there are challenges with that
17 as well. The four major issues that were previously
18 challenges pre-pandemic have been exacerbated by it.
19 One is garbage. With increased use our tonnage of
20 litter has also increased significantly. We've also
21 seen an uptick of illegal construction debris dumping
22 in our park. Two, the ecology. Because the nature
23 trails are more crowded than ever, visitors walk off
24 trail, trampling plantings and creating new and
25 harmful pathways. This has been especially

1 destructive near the Salt Marsh Nature Center,
2 reversing the success of a multiyear, multi-million
3 dollar program to stabilize the ecology. Three,
4 staffing. We need a full restoration of Parks
5 staffing. Marine Park has only dedicated, only eight
6 dedicated staff members, while significantly smaller
7 Brooklyn parks have more staff to cover less acreage.
8 Additionally, Marine Park lost its full-time
9 supervisor without explanation and suffers for it.
10 Volunteers and hiring teens for summer jobs are
11 inadequate replacements for the full-time staff.
12 Four, private support. Large volunteer groups and
13 corporate funding have been cut due to the pandemic
14 and other competing priorities. These sources of
15 labor and funding were critical to the upkeep of
16 Marine Park and are sorely missed. Numerous studies
17 have shown that the parks are essential to the mental
18 and physical health of urban communities. We must
19 restore the full Parks Department budget to support
20 the healing power of parks throughout the city, now
21 and in the future. Thank you for the opportunity.

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23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.
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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next
3 speaker is Caroline Soussloff, followed by Jennifer
4 Wainwright.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

6 CAROLINE SOUSSLOFF: Good morning. My
7 name is Caroline Soussloff and I'm a legal fellow in
8 the Environmental Justice Program at New York Lawyers
9 for the Public Interest. NYLPI works with
10 communities across the New York City area, providing
11 support and services to combat inequities,
12 injustices, and infringements on civil rights. Our
13 Environmental Justice Program has advocated and
14 litigated on the subject of the inequities of
15 distribution of environmental burdens and benefits in
16 our city for almost three decades. Thank you to
17 Chair Koo, the committee members here today, and the
18 council for providing opportunity to testify today.
19 I am pleased to be here representing NYLPI and our EJ
20 program to support community members from the St.
21 Albans neighborhood and Community Board 12 Queens in
22 their efforts to secure funding for the Department of
23 Parks and Recreation to develop and maintain two
24 parcels of land adjacent to Brinkerhoff Avenue as
25 parks. The city has neglected these parcels for

1 decades, despite repeated pleas from the community
2 for them to be properly maintained. We share the
3 community's vision of transforming this land from an
4 eyesore filled with illegal dumping into vibrant
5 green space. In order to bring this vision to life
6 NYLPI has been working closely with community
7 representatives from the Community Board 12 and
8 [inaudible] Streets Block Association, as well as the
9 Trust for Public Lands. Funding this proposed park
10 is an issue of environmental justice. St. Albans is
11 and long has been a community of color and contends
12 with a long and frustrating history of being
13 underserved and overburdened by the city. For
14 example, Community Board 12 has been the third most
15 overburdened community district in the city for
16 decades in terms of how much garbage is processed in
17 the district. Meanwhile it is home to very few parks
18 or playgrounds. St. Albans deserves equitable access
19 to green space and the benefits and remedies that
20 quality parks convey. Studies have demonstrated that
21 access to high-quality green space improves community
22 health outcomes and the community need for additional
23 parkland has only taken on greater urgency during the
24 pandemic. The community is asking the community for
25

1
2 a minimal capital investment and minimal continued
3 investment. The land in question is already home to
4 grass and trees. We are simply asking for light
5 landscaping, routine maintenance, and a removal of
6 fencing surrounding one of the parcels.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 CAROLINE SOUSSLOFF: Ah, thank you. DPR
9 already cuts the grass, but only occasionally on an
10 inconsistent basis as a courtesy. Including this
11 work in their budget would ensure that DPR
12 understands that regular maintenance is their
13 obligation. Um, NYLPI is grateful for that New York
14 City Parks Commissioner Silver, Queens Parks
15 Commissioner Dockett, and Council Member Daneek
16 Miller have all expressed support for this project in
17 past, and we ask that this committee follow their
18 leadership and alliance funding for the project in
19 the fiscal year 2022 budget. Thank you to all of you
20 having me here today.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is
23 Jennifer Wainwright, followed by Christine Datz-
24 Romero.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

1 JENNIFER WAINWRIGHT: Good afternoon,
2
3 Chair Koo and members of the committees. My name is
4 Jennifer Wainwright and I am the communication
5 manager for the Randall's Island Park Alliance, RIPA.
6 I appreciate the opportunity to testify today. Due
7 to COVID, like many of our sister conservancies, our
8 operating budget took an enormous hit. We furloughed
9 staff, cut budgets, and creatively restructured, all
10 while the park saw record-breaking use, especially
11 from neighboring communities in East Harlem and the
12 South Bronx. Cuts to funding for parks have created
13 additionally challenges due to the increased usage in
14 park land. This placed an added burden on RIPA's
15 already-reduced resources, as we work to pick up the
16 slack. There was also a stop on procurements for
17 even basic OTPS needs. With increased usage and
18 Parks Department cuts, RIPA seeks support to operate
19 pathways which have seen more visitors than ever
20 along with general programmatic support to keep the
21 park active, clean, and safe. It is crucial that the
22 New York City Council fight to restore funding for
23 the Parks Department and continue to supplement this
24 funding through expense funding, such as the Parks
25 Equity Initiative and in support of capital projects.

1
2 COVID has shown us the critical need for our open
3 spaces and public parks. New Yorkers have come
4 increasingly to depend upon free, safe, clean outdoor
5 spaces for recreation, relaxation, and exercise.
6 With sufficient upkeep, public spaces can and should
7 provide a safe space where all New Yorkers can take a
8 break and come together, an essential resource
9 serving our most basic well-being. New York City
10 Parks Department funding should be not only restored
11 but in fact expanded. Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next speaker is
15 Christine Datz-Romero, followed by Allie Ryan.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Give us one second,
18 ah, ah, Christine while we just try to unmute you.
19 There you go. Please begin.

20 CHRISTINE DATZ-ROMERO: Oh, great, thank
21 you. Um, my name is Christine Datz-Romero and I'm
22 the executive director of the Lower East Side Ecology
23 Center. Um, we have been the steward for East River
24 Park for the last 22 years and, ah, as such I want
25 to, um, testify today. Ah, we have seen this park

1
2 really renovated in, ah, late 2012, and the landscape
3 could not be maintained with the resources that were
4 allocated because we only have one gardener for a 59-
5 acre, ah, waterfront park and millions of dollars in
6 capital money was basically, um, wasted because, um,
7 ah, there were no resources here to really maintain
8 this park, and that was in a good year. Ah, Parks
9 has really suffered from structural underfunding for
10 decades now. Ah, with the budget impacts due to
11 COVID-19 a perfect storm was created and seasonal
12 staff, PEP, Urban Park Rangers and Natural Resources
13 Group all suffered staff reduction by Parks and our
14 open spaces were used more than ever. We stand firm
15 with the Play Fair Coalition and urge the City
16 Council to restore Parks funding to pre-pandemic
17 levels and we would like to see a commitment to
18 allocate 1% of the city budget to Parks in the future
19 once we, ah, we have a more robust, ah, ah, budget to
20 really dedicate resources to. Parks has so many
21 vital functions for New Yorkers, gathering spaces,
22 access to recreational spaces, and natural areas, and
23 with the escalating climate crisis Parks must also
24 play a crucial role in fighting climate change. We
25 are calling on Parks to embrace the responsibility

1
2 for better management of the yard and organic waste
3 and to embrace expert organizations such as the Lower
4 East Side Ecology Center to assist, to assist in
5 implementing composting programs. We have partnered
6 with Parks for the last 23 years to do just that, and
7 now the composting program is facing eviction from
8 East River Park without much transparency why Parks
9 came to this decision. Parks needs to...

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 CHRISTINE DATZ-ROMERO: ...[inaudible]
12 sustainability practices and embrace partnerships
13 with community-based organizations that have the
14 knowledge and dedication to get this job done. Thank
15 you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next
17 speaker is Allie Ryan, who will be followed by Sarah
18 Williams.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

20 ALLIE RYAN: Hello. My name is Allie
21 Ryan and I'm a member of East River Park Action and
22 Metro Area Governors Island Coalition. But today I
23 am representing myself as a parent who lives in
24 Alphabet City. First, on behalf of my children and
25 their friends I want to thank former Council Member

1
2 Rosie Mendez and current Council Member Carlina
3 Rivera as well as the Parks Department for renovating
4 several playgrounds in my neighborhood, most recently
5 Sawyer Park. As a parent, I can attest families use
6 these parks every day. I was going to talk about the
7 Parks Department youth sports program, East River
8 Park, and Governors Island. But I will address them
9 in my written testimony. Yesterday afternoon my
10 young daughters were playing with their friends at
11 First Park Playground at the corner of Houston and
12 First Avenue. While playing the children discovered
13 a dead rat and attempted to move the dead rat until I
14 intervened. I called 311 and requested that the rat
15 be removed. The 311 representative told me that the
16 rat would be removed within 10 days by members of the
17 park, by a member of the Parks Department. This is
18 not the first time that my children encountered a
19 dead rat at a playground, but this is the first time
20 I've been told that it would take up to 10 days for a
21 dead animal's removal. For families, public parks
22 are our communal back yards. I think I can speak for
23 the neighbor, sorry, I think I can speak for the
24 parents in my neighborhood when I say I am grateful
25 to the Parks Department workers who work diligently

1
2 to keep our public playgrounds clean. Please restore
3 the public, um, the Parks Department budget. Thank
4 you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next
6 speaker is Sarah Williams, followed by Fay Hill.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

8 SARAH WILLIAMS: Thank you. I'm Sarah
9 McCall Williams, executive director of Green
10 Guerrillas, a nonprofit that supports community
11 gardeners and activates youth engaged in food justice
12 across the city. Special thanks to Council Members
13 Ayala, Gibson, Cabrera, Eugene, Cornegy, and then-
14 Council Member Torres, and also many of the council
15 members present at this hearing today who have been
16 strong supporters of community gardens. During
17 fiscal year 2020 council members across the Bronx and
18 Brooklyn had allocated \$155,000 discretionary funds
19 for our work with community gardens through the Parks
20 Equity Initiative and through Greener New York, but
21 largely through Parks Equity. This year we have been
22 allocated less than \$40,000 due to cuts to Parks
23 Equity Initiative. As a lean and efficient
24 organization, Green Guerrillas was able to act
25 quickly in March of 2020, as soon as the pandemic

1 hit. With last year's Parks Equity Initiative funds
2 we were able to provide immediate and direct support
3 in the form of seeds, seedlings, lumber, soil, tools,
4 and personal protective equipment to community
5 gardens who were redoubling their efforts to grow
6 food for their communities. Communities that were
7 already experiencing food insecurity before COVID-19
8 are now depending on community gardens to survive.
9 Community gardeners are continuing at food production
10 efforts during the 2021 growing season, many of them
11 ramping up their growing capacity for distribution to
12 families, neighbors, and local organizations in need,
13 sometimes uniting with other gardens, ah, to
14 distribute across large networks. Unfortunately, due
15 to cuts in Parks Equity Initiative funding, which has
16 greatly diminished our funding from the city, our
17 capacity to assist these gardeners in their vital
18 community work is likewise greatly diminished. We
19 join with our colleagues in the Play Fair Coalition
20 to urge the city to restore full funding for the
21 Parks Equity Initiative after last year's budget
22 cuts. Further, we ask the city to increase their
23 support for community gardens as essential
24 infrastructure for neighborhood food production, rest
25

1
2 and respite, and great environmental benefit, and to
3 offer community-affirming funding to ensure that they
4 can continue to enrich communities across the city.

5 Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next
7 speaker is Fay Hill, who will be followed by Jordan
8 Heiden.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

10 FAY HILL: Good afternoon, New York City
11 elected officials and our chair, ah, Chairman Koo.
12 My name is Fay Hill, a resident of Springfield
13 Gardens, and district leader for Assembly 31-B in
14 Queens. As a retired, ah, executive legal secretary,
15 I'm also the executive director secretary for
16 Volunteers for Springfield Park in Queens, a member
17 of Community Board 13 and chairperson for the parks
18 and the environment committee for the past eight
19 years. I'm here to testify on behalf of the
20 communities as a whole and to thank our New York
21 Parks on the remarkable work they have contributed to
22 our communities. These are hard-working leaders who
23 have contributed to the awareness and the improvement
24 for parks and green spaces in New York City. I would
25 like to also take a pause to our former councilman,

1
2 Donovan Richards, who made it possible to the budget
3 for the parks in southeast Queens and the Far
4 Rockaway for the past six years, and have done a
5 major improvement to our parks, and hope to continue
6 to do so. I live in Springfield Gardens for over 40
7 years and I've seen our parks deteriorated,
8 prostitution, drug infested, and our residents were
9 unable to use their parks in both Springfield Gardens
10 and Rosedale and surrounding communities during the
11 city's council administration during their budget
12 session. We were totally ignored for many years.
13 The upper respiratory and asthma disease that
14 increased and if you do not have trees and green
15 spaces for our residents we continue to suffer. I am
16 pleading to the budget committee to be, to be fair
17 with Parks. Now our Parks has somewhat improved and
18 the quality of life has become a part of, for our
19 residents to enjoy their parks. We need more funding
20 where we can hire more parks workers, park patrol and
21 maintenance, and the upkeep of our parks so we
22 continue to enjoy them. I must draw your attention
23 again to the pandemic we are now facing and the
24 emphasis in how our parks are open and being used on
25 a record basis. The past year our park did not have

2 enough spaces to accommodate residents all over the
3 city. The park where our board members strive to...

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 FAY HILL: ...keep clean because of lack
6 of park workers used in a breaking, ah, breaking
7 capacity during 2020. Funding is, is imperative to
8 award to our parks for our city residents to enjoy
9 relaxation, also enjoy the quality of life. Thank
10 you for listening. I have more to say and I am going
11 to miss, ah, Commissioner Silver and, ah, I hope him
12 all the best. Thank you. Respectfully submitted,
13 Fay D. Hill.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next, our
15 next speaker is Jordan Heiden, who will be followed
16 by Mike Schnall.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

18 JORDAN HEIDEN: Good afternoon, everyone.
19 My name is Jordan Heiden and I represent Gowanus
20 Canal Conservancy, a nonprofit organization dedicated
21 to facilitating the development of a resilient,
22 vibrant, open space network centered on the Gowanus
23 Canal. And thank you for providing me opportunity to
24 submit testimony. Today I am urging the City Council
25 to prioritize the long-term healthy and

1
2 sustainability of our city by restoring the Parks
3 Equity Initiative and last year's drastic budget cuts
4 to New York City parks. Through this pandemic our
5 parks, natural areas, street trees, and gardens have
6 been essential, providing New Yorkers with comfort,
7 connection, exercise, and respite. In a neighborhood
8 like Gowanus, where combined sewer overflow, street
9 flooding, and urban heat island are everyday occurs,
10 parks, street trees, and other green infrastructure
11 soak up storm water to reduce flooding and sewage
12 overflow, shade and cool our streets, and reduce air
13 pollution. In Gowanus 670 young trees and 38 rain
14 gardens installed over the past decade provide
15 ecosystem services that make the neighborhood more
16 livable and resilient, especially in times of crisis.
17 Last year's budget cuts also significantly impacted
18 the Parks Equity Initiative, which supports GCC
19 programs such as the Gowanus Tree Network, which help
20 to fill gaps in the Parks Department's capacity to
21 care for young street trees, engaging more than 1000
22 volunteers and students annually in the stewardship
23 of street trees, parks, and gardens through the
24 Gowanus neighborhood. GCC stands strongly with our
25 partners in the Play Fair Coalition to ensure future

1
2 budget planning prioritizes essential maintenance,
3 job creation, and security for frontline park workers
4 and funding for nonprofit stewardship activities to
5 support this valuable infrastructure. In this time
6 of crisis it is more important than ever to protect
7 essential infrastructure and support a resilient and
8 equitable city. I sincerely thank you for your time
9 and consideration.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next
11 speaker is Michael Schnall, followed by Angel
12 Hernandez.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

14 MICHAEL SCHNALL: Good afternoon, Chair
15 Koo. My name is Mike Schnall and I'm a candidate for
16 the New York City Council running to represent the
17 49th Council District, covering the north shore of
18 Staten Island. Thank you for the opportunity to
19 testify. As a proud alumnus of New York City
20 Council, first serving in the council finance
21 division and then a legislative director for a
22 member, I'm really proud to be here today. I also
23 served almost 10 years in New York City Parks and
24 have attended and testified at over 50 committee and
25 budget hearings, so I feel everyone's pain today.

1
2 I'm testifying today in support of every effort the
3 New York City Council can possibly make to provide
4 funding to protect, preserve, enhance, and care for
5 our precious parks and open space. I support the
6 Play Fair Now campaign, which was prescient in its
7 efforts in 2019, recognizing that parks and open
8 space would be [inaudible] with many of us the mental
9 health oases we needed to perseverance through the
10 pandemic. I support every effort to maintain and
11 enhance staffing levels so the care and operation
12 needed to maintain our parkland becomes a priority
13 for the city that has historically disinvested in the
14 needs of our emerald empire. Parks are more
15 important than ever to our health and well-being and
16 the council will hopefully not just support the
17 agency, but also the dozens and dozens of parks-
18 related nonprofit conservancies and friends of groups
19 that pour their blood, sweat, and tears into keeping
20 our parks clean, green, and healthy and safe. I just
21 want to say that while I am deeply sad that Parks
22 Commissioner Silver is leaving, I had the pleasure to
23 work with him and for him before leaving the agency
24 and I've come to respect his empathic approach to
25 caring for parks, his visionary leadership on

1
2 remaking parks for communities neglected for decades,
3 and his commitment to equity and equality for all
4 across a vast and diverse park system. I thank you
5 for the opportunity to testify.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is
7 Angel Hernandez, followed by Alexandra Unthank.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

9 ANGEL HERNANDEZ: Hello, Chairman Koo and
10 members of the committee. My name is Angel
11 Hernandez. I'm director of government relations for
12 the New York Botanical Garden, NYBG. Thank you for
13 allowing me to testify today on behalf of the
14 cultural institutions with CIG, the Coalition for
15 [inaudible] and science organizations located in all
16 five boroughs and collectively welcome visits from
17 millions of New York City public school children and
18 residents. Many CIG members, like NYBG, along with
19 other partnering outdoor living museums, such as the
20 Bronx and Staten Island Zoos, Queens and Brooklyn
21 Botanic Gardens, and Snug Harbor, are all located on
22 parkland. Operating on these grounds allows us to
23 continue our great work to serve our communities,
24 while continuing endeavors in the sciences and
25 environmental preservation for unique fauna and

1
2 flora. Since COVID-19 attacked our city last year,
3 these institutions have provided free access to our
4 city residents, served as meal distribution sites and
5 distributed PPE to members of their communities in
6 need. CIG live in museums, have contributed to the
7 public life, public health, and public service of all
8 and years throughout the pandemic. I'd like to focus
9 on NYBG's commitment to public health. In a time
10 when social distancing and a need of reprieve from
11 quarantine, NYBG immediately offered safe open space
12 since last year. Since then we received over 300,000
13 visitors, over 100,000 of those offered at no cost to
14 Bronx residents and healthcare workers. During our
15 shutdown last year our staffing immediately addressed
16 a growing food insecurity in the Bronx by donating
17 over 300 tons of fresh produce to local food relief
18 organizations and public schools. Also we began to
19 offer technical assistance and donated tens of
20 thousands of seedling plants to local community
21 gardens, such as Bissell and River Run Gardens in
22 City Council District 12, an effort to create food
23 hubs so that they can feed their respective
24 communities. Yet our efforts in continuing the work
25 will be hampered if CIG...

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

3 ANGEL HERNANDEZ: ...[inaudible] where
4 FY22 is compromised. We continue to operate on
5 limited capacity. Understanding that city funds have
6 been reallocated towards efforts to fight COVID-19,
7 the CIG group, along with its members outdoor living
8 museums we just only ask that cultural budget be held
9 harmless and maintained at FY21 levels as we await
10 further information on federal relief that may be
11 available to the city and state. Thank you for your
12 support for New York City parks and the cultural
13 community.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

15 Our next speaker is Alexandra Unthank, followed by
16 Scott Daly.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

18 ALEXANDRA UNTHANK: Hello. Um, ah, dear
19 Chair Peter Koo and the members of the committee on
20 Parks and Recreation, good afternoon. Thank you for
21 the opportunity to testify. Um, my name is Alex
22 Unthank, the education assistance of the Louis
23 Latimer House Museum. And I'm reading this testimony
24 for our education, I mean, sorry, for the executive
25 director, Ran Yan, who can't be here today.

1
2 Designated a landmark and sitting on the Department
3 of Parks and Recreation site, the Louis Latimer House
4 Museum was the home for 26 years of a black inventor
5 who is renowned for his work in the field of electric
6 lighting. Among Latimer's numerous achievements and
7 inventions, the most important discovery was a method
8 for producing carbon filaments made, ah, that made
9 the production of light bulbs both practical and
10 affordable for the average household. During the
11 temporary, ah, closure due to COVID our virtual
12 programs have become a growing success and an evident
13 relief to our constituents. However, we face immense
14 challenge to reopening. Um, the historic site's
15 internet access broke down earlier this year, so
16 significant that returning to the office becomes all
17 but impossible under the current condition. We
18 respectfully request assistance from the Parks
19 telecommunications team, Historic House Trust, and
20 the City Council to repair and upgrade the internet
21 access on this important historic site. Having
22 functional internet up to modern standard is urgent
23 and critical for us to carry out the essential work
24 in interpreting Latimer's story and educating diverse
25 youths. We ask you to invest in the infrastructure

1
2 of this African American heritage site owned by Parks
3 so that Louis Latimer's untold story is no longer
4 overlooked. Um, our board and staff look forward to
5 working all of you to ensure that this landmarked
6 home is well maintained and accessible and that is
7 legacy is properly celebrated by the New York City
8 public. Thank you for all of your work and support.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.
10 Our next speaker is Scott Daly, who will be followed
11 by Stacy Papas.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

13 SCOTT DALY: Good afternoon, everybody,
14 Chair Koo, members of the committee. My name is
15 Scott Daly and I am the senior director of the New
16 York Junior Tennis and Learning, NYJTL, free
17 community tennis programs throughout the city. We
18 are funded by the council and through a separate
19 initiative and by individual members. I'm here
20 testifying at the Parks because without our
21 relationship and partnership with the city parks we
22 wouldn't have any access to tennis for kids since
23 COVID struck. When I look back on my notes it seems
24 that, I seem to recall it was almost exactly a year
25 ago today, I think it was Friday the 13th, I was last

1 before this committee speaking down at City Hall on
2 this topic. Um, right now, generally speaking, if
3 wasn't a COVID year we would reach 85,000 New York
4 City kids between the ages of 5 and 18 years of age.
5 It is a totally free program and it's only because of
6 the assistance with get and the funding we get from
7 the City Council. Right now this tennis program is
8 basically broken down and you see the testimony
9 that's going to be submitted. It breaks down evenly
10 across the board demographics. 25% are African
11 American. 25% are Asian. 25% are Latino. This past
12 year, just let me tell you, we were able to get
13 permits and go out and bring tennis to kids who have
14 to get outside. The, the registration numbers are
15 through the roof, that these kids want to get out.
16 In the fall we were at nine locations. They got
17 permits, and the only places we could go were city
18 parks. The city parks worked with us. Right now we
19 have 11 programs that are gonna be starting at the
20 end of April next year, end of April of this coming
21 year. Again, city parks is giving us access and I
22 can't thank the parks enough. It can't be done
23 without the help and the support of the City Council.
24 City Council right now, we have our ask in for 1.2

1 million dollars. We need at least to hold what we
2 got last year under the initiative. We have separate
3 protocols, safety procedures in place, PPE, extra
4 staff members. The numbers, we are maxing out at all
5 our sites. I just want to say in conclusion thank
6 you, thank you, thank you. We are providing a
7 service and we wouldn't be able to do it without your
8 continued support. Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next
11 speaker is Stacy Papas, followed by Caroline Parker.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

13 STACY PAPAS: Hello. My name is Stacy
14 Papas. I'm an East Harlem resident and executive
15 director of Friends of the East River Esplanade.
16 Thank you, Commissioner Silver, for your many years
17 of support of the esplanade. We're sorry to see you
18 go and we wish you well. Our mission is to advocate
19 for the restoration and reinvention of the esplanade
20 from 60th to 120th Streets, including Pier 107.
21 We're grateful to Mayor de Blasio for allocating 75
22 millions of dollars in 2019 and an additional 284
23 million dollars this year to repair the esplanade.
24 And thank you, Commissioner Silver, for confirming IT
25 earlier. I'm here today requesting that the 284

1 million dollars are approved for the fiscal year 22
2 budget and that design work begins immediately using
3 the previously allocated 75 million. Since
4 preliminary design work has begun on the adjacent
5 Harlem Greenway link at 125th Street, it would be
6 logical to extend that project south, especially
7 because the esplanade is barricaded from 117 to 114.
8 This area is now legally defined as an environmental
9 justice area according to Local Law 60 and 64, so
10 we're going to assume the repair of the esplanade in
11 East Harlem is a top priority for the current
12 administration in future. Conditions on the
13 esplanade are in a constant state of depreciation.
14 The longer repair work is postponed the more
15 extensive and expensive the project is going to get.
16 My testimony today is in support of fast tracking the
17 284 million dollar budget allocation into the fiscal
18 year 2022 budget and pursuing a design build model of
19 construction so that the project can move quickly.
20 East Harlem residents deserve to have a safe,
21 accessible, and beautiful waterfront as much as our
22 neighbors on the west side of Manhattan. Thank you
23 for your time today.
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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

Next is Caroline Parker, followed by Kimberley Maier.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

CAROLINE PARKER: Good afternoon. My name is Caroline Parker and I'm a legal intern in the Environmental Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, which fights for the equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens in our city. I'm here to urge you to ensure that our city's treasured community composting organizations, which embody the principles of environmental justice, receive the financial support they need to operate with dignity and stability throughout the park system. As New York City faces down the existential threat of climate change, organics recycling is a critically important pillar of the city's emissions reduction policy. Composting has repeatedly been highlighted in the city's climate and emissions targets, including the mayor's zero waste goal and the updated OneNYC framework. These policy commitments led to an expansion of multiple composting initiatives, including the NYC compost projects currently operating throughout the city's parks, which bring together local residents and

1 students, urban farmers, and grass-roots
2 sustainability organizations and collective projects
3 to reduce emissions, protect local soil health, and
4 support food security. Unfortunately, the COVID
5 pandemic and subsequent budget cuts have derailed the
6 city's composting goals. Today the community-based
7 operations sited on Parks land are the only elements
8 of the city's nascent composting system that are
9 still operating. These organizations, which are
10 primarily funded by volunteers, provide a critical
11 service to the entire city with no compensation and
12 minimal financial support. With this year's budget
13 you have an opportunity to build on this foundation
14 towards a more comprehensive and equitable composting
15 program on par with cities like San Francisco and
16 Seattle. As the steward of more than 30,000 acres of
17 public land, the Parks Department is a critical
18 partner in this goal. We know that DPR shares our
19 desire to ensure a resilient park system that serves
20 the recreational needs of all New Yorkers, and we
21 believe that community-scale composting, which brings
22 neighbors together in the name of stewardship and
23 sustainability, is fully aligned with that vision.
24 The department has on multiple occasions proclaimed
25

1
2 its support for composting and we hope that this
3 year's budget will reflect...

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 CAROLINE PARKER: ...this commitment with
6 tangible support for the grass-roots projects that
7 are already thriving through the Parks system. Thank
8 you so much for your time.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.
10 Our next speaker is Kimberly Maier, followed by Nilka
11 Martel.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

13 KIMBERLY MAIER: Good afternoon. I'm
14 Kimberley Maier. I'm the executive director of the
15 Old Stone House in Brooklyn. Ah, thank you, Chair
16 Koo and members of the Parks Committee for your, ah,
17 time and your attention and your support for our
18 programming. I am delivering this testimony on
19 behalf of my colleagues' sites in the Historic House
20 Trust network. Ah, the Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum in
21 the Bronx, the Hendrick Lott House, Old Stone House,
22 and Wyckoff House Museum in Brooklyn, Merchant's
23 House Museum, Morris-Jumel Mansion Museum in
24 Manhattan, ah, the Bowne House, King Manor Museum,
25 Kingsland Homestead, Louis Latimer House Museum, and

1
2 Queens County Farm Museum in Queens, and the Alice
3 Austin House and Historic Richmond Town on Staten
4 Island. In our testimony at the November 18, 2020 on
5 the state of historic houses under the jurisdiction
6 of the Parks Committee, we highlighted some of the
7 funding issues our private nonprofits, which operate
8 these historic sites in New York City Parks space.
9 Today we'd like to expand on those issues. Our
10 mission critical work is not possible without
11 ensuring the stability and maintenance of the
12 historic structures that house our nonprofits. As
13 Council Member Holden recognized earlier today,
14 members of the public and elected officials have
15 frequently expressed concern about the building
16 conditions of our historic sites and have commented
17 on the lack of attention that the structures receive
18 from the city and the Parks Department. Currently
19 between 23 historic sites and the Historic House
20 Trust network there is over 50 million in capital
21 funding allocated to these sites for unbuilt
22 projects, some of which have been pending for two
23 decades, further exacerbating the condition of these
24 structures. Ah, however, in the Preliminary Mayor's
25 Management Report discussing DPR's 10-year capital

1 strategy only 14.2 million is allocated to the
2 capital via historic houses, the lowest of all
3 identified facilities. In comparison, recreation and
4 nature centers are listed at 614 million, which is 43
5 times the figure identified for historic houses. Our
6 sites are assets that necessitate regular
7 preventative maintenance plans. Historic structures
8 demand a different approach to the capital process
9 and other DPR facilities, like playgrounds and
10 recreation centers, and keeping much-needed
11 [inaudible] in a streamlined and efficient manner is
12 critical for our sites to provide services for all
13 New Yorkers. Although we operate within city parks,
14 our buildings are historic landmarks buildings deeply
15 imbedded in the cultural sector.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 KIMBERLY MAIER: Its cultural
19 organizations frequently receive pilot funds to
20 administer capital interior renovation projects, all
21 of which have to be run through the Parks Department,
22 where frequent delays deplete the buying power of
23 monies raised and allow these nationally significant
24 sites to fall into states of repair, of disrepair.
25 Compounding these problems, the drawn-out process,

1 ah, and timeline results of the trust and
2 accountability with our funders and communities.
3 Maintaining these relationships is essential to our
4 operations that receive only a modest percentage of
5 operating funds through government channels. We
6 thank the City Council for the continued support of
7 our work and are happy to answer any questions that
8 you might have and, ah, we're happy to serve our
9 communities. Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is
12 Nilka Martel, followed by Robert Price.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

14 NILKA MARTEL: Good afternoon. My name
15 is Nilka Martel and I am the vice chair of the
16 [inaudible] Reliance. I'm also a lifelong Bronxite,
17 the founder and director of Love in the Bronx,
18 president of the Friends of Pelham Bay Park, and an
19 enthusiastic champion of all Bronx parks. Thank you
20 for the opportunity to provide testimony today about
21 the proposed fiscal year 22 budget and the importance
22 of restoring full funding to our vital parks. I want
23 to specifically thank City Council Member Salamanca
24 and Speaker Johnson for their generous and dedicated
25 support for the Bronx River over the years. The

1
2 Bronx River Alliance is a not-for-profit formed by
3 community activists and government partners in 2001
4 to protect, improvement, and restore the Bronx River
5 corridor and greenway so that it can be a healthy
6 resource for the communities through which they flow.
7 We work in close partnership with New York City Parks
8 and dozens of community-based organizations. We are
9 achieving what many thought was impossible - the
10 creation of beautiful waterfront parks, the
11 restoration of forested salt marshes, and even the
12 return of the beaver. Perhaps most importantly we
13 have transformed what was once an abandoned dumping
14 ground into a cherished community asset. I am here
15 today to call for the restoration of fiscal year 20
16 funding levels to New York City Parks. In 2020 our
17 parks demonstrated how essential they are to our
18 city. They were one of the few places that remained
19 open during the darkest days of the pandemic. And
20 yet New York City Parks has faced a devastating
21 budget cut, the second largest of any city agency.
22 We all saw the impact of inadequate funding for our
23 parks last year. They were full of garbage. Dumping
24 and graffiti increased. Enforcement and security
25 couldn't keep up. Our parks suffered and our New

1
2 York City residents suffered. Today the Bronx River
3 Alliance, Loving the Bronx, and the Friends of Pelham
4 Bay Park stand with all of those who are calling for
5 the city to play fair and fully reinstate funds that
6 were cut from the Parks budget in 2020.

7 Specifically, we ask you to reinstate fiscal year 20
8 levels for seasonal hires, eliminate the free, the
9 hiring freeze, which has led to key leadership
10 positions empty for over a year, restore full funding
11 for the Parks equity initiative, which has funded
12 handed-on environmental education for young people
13 along the Bronx River corridor.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

15 NILKA BENN: Restore 4 million dollars of
16 funding for the forest management framework for New
17 York City to protect our natural areas, including
18 those on the Bronx River. Thank you all for your
19 leadership and for the opportunity to express the
20 Bronx River Alliance's support for increased
21 investment in New York City parks.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up
23 is Robert Price.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.
25

1
2 ROBERT PRICE: Hey, thank you, everyone.
3 I'm Rob Price and I learned about this from Garden
4 Train, and I really appreciate everyone's comments
5 before mine and hearing the thoughtful, ah, just to
6 the extent of how much the budget has really affected
7 the parks. Um, New York City Parks really saved me
8 this last year. I lost my job. My kids, um, lost
9 their in-person schoolhouse gate. And our small
10 Brooklyn apartment, like so many other New Yorkers,
11 became our 24/7 confine. The New York City parks
12 was, ah, a place where I'd take the kids to get
13 exercise. Um, my 6 and 8 year olds had a lot of
14 energy and it really wasn't fitting the apartment
15 very well. So we would go on bike rides to explore
16 new parks. We would go to our park. Ah, I would go
17 there to meditate and exercise. And what I learned
18 is that we really created a habit of going to the
19 park and go into the parks and enjoying that. And
20 like so many other millions of New Yorkers that
21 habitual nature of going to the park and enjoying it
22 much more, that's happened over the last year because
23 of, all of the things that have been closed down is
24 becoming the new reality. And so as we go into these
25 coming years, everyone is going to be so used to

1
2 being in the parks, the community networking, the,
3 you know, expecting the safe and clean, um,
4 accessibility that we really have expected out of New
5 York City parks and we'll go and continue to go there
6 for, and, um, on a personal note when you have two
7 kids and you're playing in the park for hours and you
8 drink a lot of water, they need to go to the bathroom
9 pretty frequently, and there wasn't a lot of open
10 bathrooms, so I think that really comes down to the
11 budgeting. Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next
13 speaker is Anthony Font, who will be followed by
14 Wendy Page.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

16 ANTHONY FONT: Hello, everyone, my name
17 is Anthony Font. Can you hear me? Hello?

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: We hear you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, go ahead.

20 ANTHONY FONT: OK. Um, I, ah, represent
21 the prideful and upstanding homeowners of
22 Brinckerhoff Avenue in St. Albans, as well as the
23 prideful and upstanding homeowners of Fonda Avenue in
24 St. Albans. I'm also a member of the St. Albans
25 Alpha Streets Block Association. My parents

1 purchased a home on Brinkerhoff Avenue in St. Albans
2 in 1955. In fact, it was directly behind the Elmira
3 Avenue home of our former Secretary of State and
4 Chair of the Joint Chiefs, Colin Powell. My dear
5 mother, Mrs. Gwendolyn Font, passed in 2016, and my
6 dad, Joseph Font, Jr., who is 90, still resides at
7 the house. Until several years ago all four
8 landscape traffic islands on Brinkerhoff Avenue were
9 maintained by the Parks Department, by the Parks
10 Department. For all of my life Parks Department
11 personnel, vehicles, and equipment provided
12 substandard care to these four traffic islands, with
13 the exception of the satisfactory upkeep they
14 received during Mayor Dinkins's administration and
15 the meticulous servicing they go during the quality
16 of life emphasis in Giuliani's first term. Parks
17 even posted green street signage bearing its leaf
18 logo on the islands in roughly the late 80s, early
19 90s. About three years ago Parks began to claim that
20 it was and had been cutting the block's three
21 rectangular, rectangular islands, which lie between
22 Liberty Avenue and Hannibal Street as a courtesy to
23 the DOT. At that time...

24
25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

1
2 ANTHONY FONT: ...it reportedly said that
3 it only had jurisdiction over the triangular island
4 that sits between Hannibal Street and Mayville
5 Street. The Parks Department currently claims, the
6 Parks Department currently claims that it only
7 maintains the triangle as a courtesy now. I have
8 been...

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Please finish up.

10 ANTHONY FONT: I have been literally
11 calling for decent upkeep and have physically, have
12 been physically providing care for the island since
13 the late 70s. For example, calls to Parks officers
14 for service, complaints waged to the borough
15 president's office, 311 complaints for overgrown
16 grass and weeds, as well as illegal dumping and
17 parking, complaints brought to current Councilman
18 Daneek Miller's office, as well as those of his
19 predecessors Camry and Spigner. Personally mowing
20 and trimming....

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

22 ANTHONY FONT: ...along with other
23 residents during the late 70s and 80s, as well as
24 personally planting and nurturing trees on them,
25 continuing to rid them of litter during that time and

1
2 on an ongoing basis up until the present,
3 respectively. Therefore, the homeowners of
4 Brinkerhoff and Fonda Avenue require new, excuse me.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Please finish up.

6 ANTHONY FONT: All right. Therefore, the
7 homeowners of Brinkerhoff and Fonda Avenue require
8 new and substantial curbing. Never in the 66 years
9 that my property tax-paying family and other long-
10 time homeowners have been residing there has any
11 curbing maintenance or curbing restoration been
12 performed. The Fonda Avenue side's curbing is
13 nonexistent. The terrain is level with the road. On
14 the Brinkerhoff Avenue and Mayville Street perimeters
15 only remnants of the curbing remain. This condition
16 has caused soil erosion. The land soil needs
17 replenishment and grass seeding. We also call for
18 the plentiful planting of trees on the islands'
19 barren areas, preferably blue spruce and pine. And
20 finally regular maintenance of all four islands,
21 mowing, tractor service, the trimming of all areas
22 surrounding trees and bushes is adamantly called for
23 at least every fortnight for three weeks, from spring
24 to fall. I and many of my fellow St. Albans property
25

2 owners thank Chairman Koo and all of the committee
3 for your service.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

5 ANTHONY FONT: Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next and last
7 registered speaker is Wendy Page.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: It appears that Ms.
10 Page is no longer [inaudible].

11 WENDY PAGE: I'm here.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Oh, you are, OK.
13 Sorry, please, please go ahead.

14 WENDY PAGE: OK. Good afternoon,
15 Chairman Koo, council members, and members of the
16 Parks Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to
17 present my testimony requesting much-needed funding
18 for New York City Parks. My name is Wendy Page and
19 I'm here today representing the United Athletic
20 Association, a not-for-profit advocacy group
21 representing some 16 sports organizations throughout
22 New York City. We are also members of the New
23 Yorkers for Parks Play Fair Coalition and helped to
24 get previous budgets increased for Parks. UAA is
25 asking for a full restoration of funding for New York

1 City Parks staffing. Last year New York City Parks
2 had a reduction in maintenance and operations
3 seasonal staff causing a significant decrease in work
4 hours and maintenance visits to Parks and athletic
5 fields. We are seeing Astro turf fields that were
6 resurfaced with new turf already in need of repair.
7 If this continues and no maintenance programs are put
8 in put in place, compounded by the lack of rules,
9 regulations, and guidelines, these fields will
10 continue to become unsafe and unplayable. These
11 fields will need to be reconstructed again within the
12 next 12 months, costing the taxpayers and the city
13 hundreds of thousands of dollars, which we do not
14 have at present. If Parks current rules and
15 regulations are properly followed [inaudible] are
16 properly assigned and maintained, reconstructed
17 fields can and will exceed its life expectancy,
18 remaining safe and usable throughout while preserving
19 the integrity of these fields for the rest, the next
20 10-plus years. We continue to support the tremendous
21 investment this body and the city has and continues
22 to make in our parks and athletic fields. The
23 appropriate investment in funding would enable proper
24 field maintenance be given the importance and
25

1
2 priority it deserves. In closing, we agree with
3 Council Member Holden. We need an independent
4 investigation.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

6 WENDY PAGE: The investigation is not
7 just to find out what we already know, but what we
8 don't know. We need to know that those making
9 decisions are adhering to the very same laws that the
10 council enacted and expect the rest of us to follow.
11 It's our right to know the city and its agencies are
12 playing by the rules put in place to protect us from
13 abuse of power, lack of transparency, and
14 accessibility. And that really is what the
15 investigation would need to be about. Thank you so
16 much for your time.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And we have one last,
20 ah, speaker who is calling in. I believe it's
21 Roxanne Delgado.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I believe we're just
24 trying to get her connected, just please bear with us
25 for a second or two. Hello? Ms. Delgado, are you

1
2 able to speak or hear us? Please bear with us
3 another minute. Thank you.

4 ROXANNE DELGADO: Hello? OK, hello?

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes, we hear you.

6 ROXANNE DELGADO: Hello?

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

8 ROXANNE DELGADO: Hi, I think I heard my
9 name, Roxanne Delgado?

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, you're, yes.

11 ROXANNE DELGADO: Oh, hi.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Please
13 begin. Thank you.

14 ROXANNE DELGADO: I'm sorry.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

16 ROXANNE DELGADO: I'm actually outside
17 working, but, ah, thank you. My name is Roxanne
18 Delgado. I'm the founder of Friends of Pelham
19 Parkway. Earlier today I sent a lot of photos of,
20 um, depicting of what we go through frequently in
21 Pelham Parkway in the Bronx and other parts of the
22 green spaces in, ah, in, in the Bronx. First, the
23 first photos show all the trees that were, ah,
24 damaged by the Parks' front mower. It's unfortunate
25 because I don't know what they do, every time they

1
2 come to mow the grass they damage trees, and there is
3 severe damages and trauma on these trees and no one
4 from Forestry bothers to, to check on these trees.
5 They've just left them there damaged and, and left
6 to, um, to survive on their own if they do survive.
7 Then I sent you lots of pictures of trash bags. Some
8 of the corners have over 20 trash bags which I, I
9 myself picked up, emptied out myself, and left it for
10 Parks to pick up after 10 days, 15 days, and Parks
11 tells me well no employees would pick it up. I said
12 but we cannot leave it overfilled because then it
13 flows onto the ground and, and it kind of deters
14 people from being more mindful of, ah, loving their
15 parks instead of, ah, tossing trash and littering.
16 But when you see trash cans overfilled and people
17 just throwing trash on the ground instead of using
18 the trash bins. And because I complaint so much
19 they've been moving my trash cans, so I went outdoors
20 to get more trash cans and then, um, unfortunately
21 Parks does not do more with less, they do less with
22 less. And unfortunately Pelham Parkway is a parkway,
23 not a playground, so we're not given priority like
24 playgrounds are, and, and talk about injustice, um,
25 [inaudible] of justice, a lot of the resources are

1
2 reallocated to other bigger parks or playgrounds and
3 Pelham Parkway and other green spaces including, um,
4 ah, street trees and, and green streets are left to
5 their own accord and therefore as last year from June
6 to late October we did weekly clean-ups. And mind
7 you, I'm not a nonprofit, I don't collect donations,
8 I'm not making any money out of this, but I did it
9 because our park was left to, to its own accord and
10 let it die, and let it be neglected, and I said we're
11 not gonna allow this parkway to deteriorate because
12 we spent three years of our, our heart and sweat...

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

14 ROXANNE DELGADO: ...to keep this park
15 clean and now the Parks Department walked away from
16 it. And unfortunately we have a park manager,
17 Matthew Dorian, who doesn't seem to have any, um, any
18 community mindfulness towards the residents or the
19 volunteers, who seems to just want to put rosy
20 reports and to elevate himself in the corporate
21 ladder of the Parks agency and he is, he says what
22 they want to hear, that everything is fine and dandy,
23 and it's not. And talking about, one, we need more
24 funding, but you have to look into oversight because
25 when they [inaudible] funding [inaudible] certain

1 parts of the Bronx we're left to, we're left to care
2 for our own parks, to maintenance and emptying out
3 trash cans, and unfortunately just recently about
4 seven weeks ago I actually picked up a needle and I
5 pricked myself. I had to get tested and now I have
6 to get retested in two weeks again. I shouldn't have
7 to go through this because, um, the agency doesn't
8 care for the park to be able to manage it, ah,
9 besides, to neglect the parkway and focus on bigger
10 parks because maybe, um, to elevate, to elevate
11 himself in the corporate ladder, Matthew Dorian. You
12 know, we've been going through a lot because last
13 year we were told we could not have [inaudible] clean
14 up more than 20 volunteers but I guess we have big,
15 big parties, over 45 people [inaudible] no face
16 masks, drinking, barbecuing, and it, Parks
17 enforcement, Parks enforcement didn't do anything.
18 Meanwhile, I'm feeling, ah, [inaudible] not allowed
19 to help clean up with more than 15 people. I mean,
20 it doesn't, it doesn't make sense how Parks is
21 actually, ah, hindering the progress we made as
22 volunteers and, and residents because we get over 35
23 volunteers sometimes in our cleanups and we don't
24 even, we're not even a nonprofit. We don't have any
25

1
2 money, but people are doing it because we help
3 through outreach for people to, to appreciate the
4 beauty of, of nature and of trees, and but
5 unfortunately we have a lot of environmental
6 injustice in our area because of the park manager.
7 We, just we think he did a tree planting plan where
8 he planted trees everywhere but where we are because
9 we're, we're located in NYCHA, but he's park, he's
10 planting his trees near the homeowners, near Jacobi
11 Hospital, but not where NYCHA is, exists because and
12 I happen to live right next to NYCHA so this impacts
13 me directly, with no public input, we're just
14 environmental injustice because environmental justice
15 means that the community can participate...

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Miss, Miss, please wrap
17 up.

18 ROXANNE DELGADO: ...[inaudible] I'm
19 sorry, what?

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: I said, I said please
21 wrap up.

22 ROXANNE DELGADO: OK.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

24 ROXANNE DELGADO: Um, I'll end up with
25 two sentences. I thank you for the...

2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: You're over the time
3 limit.

4 ROXANNE DELGADO: OK, so my last sentence
5 is environmental justice is when the city agencies
6 refuses to, ah, give opportunity to the community to
7 have impactful decisions that impact them directly.
8 So thank you for your time and enjoy, have a good
9 weekend.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK, thank you for your
11 suggestions.

12 ROXANNE DELGADO: Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much,
14 and I believe that was our last speaker for this
15 hearing, so I will turn it back to Chair Koo to offer
16 some closing remarks and to adjourn this hearing.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Kris.
18 You've done a good job, yeah. Thank you to the Parks
19 Department and their staff and everyone who took the
20 time to speak today. It's clear from today's
21 testimony that parks have really become our
22 everything and that investing in our parks is an
23 investment in our residents and our city's recovery.
24 I look forward to continuing to work with everyone to
25 ensure that the city's public parks and robust parks

1
2 programming have the funding they need in this budget
3 and all the future budgets. Thank you again to
4 Monica, Cheema, Kris, Patrick, Stephanie Ruiz, and
5 the entire finance division. Ah, and also, ah, first
6 I want to thank my own staff for all their hard work
7 on this hearing. And with that I will adjourn this
8 meeting. [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date May 28, 2021