



New York City Council

Hearing on the Process for Events Permitting at Parks in the Shadow of COVID-19.

June 23, 2021

Testimony By: Sarah Charlop-Powers, Natural Areas Conservancy, Executive Director

My name is Sarah Charlop-Powers and I am the Executive Director of the Natural Areas Conservancy. Thank you Councilmember Koo and the Committee for the opportunity to testify today. The Natural Areas Conservancy is a nonprofit organization that was formed in 2012 with the goal of increasing the capacity of NYC Parks and its partners to restore and manage the 10,000 acres of forests and wetlands under the agency's jurisdiction. I am testifying today to implore the Parks Committee to act to ensure that next year's budget include funding for the care of natural areas - spaces that have been critically important to New Yorkers during the pandemic.

A signature project of our organization was the development of the "Forest Management Framework for New York City", which we released in partnership with NYC Parks in Spring 2018. This plan includes ecological and social metrics for the care of the city's natural forests and calls for an investment of \$385 million to manage them over the next 25 years.

We were thrilled in 2019 by the leadership of the City Council and Mayor, which resulted in \$43 million of expense funding for NYC Parks, including \$4 million to support the management of 7,300 acres of forested natural areas. This funding was used to implement the first year of recommendations from the Forest Management Framework. NYC Parks was incredibly efficient with these funds. They employed 47 seasonal staff, planted 20,000 new trees and shrubs, engaged 2,000 volunteers, improved 40 miles of trails, and cared for 900 acres of parkland.

The plight of our City's natural areas has mirrored that of the full park system over the past year. Visitation to natural areas increased 65% between 2019 and 2020. At the same time, the Parks Department's ability to care for the 1/3 of parks property that is natural areas has been drastically impacted due to budget cuts and the loss of more than 50 seasonal staff. Another significant challenge is the impacts of the hiring freeze, which has left key leadership positions empty for more than a year and resulted in an incalculable loss of institutional knowledge.

Today, I stand with my trusted colleagues and friends in strong support of Play Fair, calling for the full reinstatement of funds that were cut from the agency's budget last year. It is imperative that next year's budget include \$4.5 million to continue conserving and caring for our natural forests, and begin critical improvements for our City's wetlands and trails network.

Thank you again for your leadership and for the opportunity to express our support for increased investment in NYC Parks.

Lucy Sexton

New Yorkers for Culture & Arts

City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation June 23, 2021

Oversight - The Process for Events Permitting at Parks in the Shadow of COVID-19

Thank you Chair Koo and members of the City Council. My name is Lucy Sexton and I am with the cultural advocacy coalition New Yorkers for Culture & Arts whose membership includes arts and culture groups and workers from across the five boroughs.

I want to address the use of the parks for cultural events by non profit cultural groups and independent artists. The city's parks are one of its true treasures and we of course want access to those treasures to be democratic and available to all the city's communities. So I will address some of the barriers experienced by non profit cultural groups, particularly groups and artists without deep pockets.

I want to start by thanking and recognizing the hard work and personal follow up done by the Parks Department staff dealing with permits. Once a group has engaged and applied there is responsive support by the park department staff and great ongoing relationships are built.

However getting to that stage is not always easy. In the lead up to the Council's passage of Open Culture, which allowed permitting for specific streets across the city, the Department of Cultural Affairs put together an info session on city permitting processes. Four or five different agencies presented, and that is part of the problem. It is not at all clear how to navigate the permitting process since you first need to know the correct agency. Is this a city park, a state park, a community garden, a DoT plaza.

Parks should find ways to message the processes clearly and make sure the information is reaching every community. I would go so far as to ask that the parks include permitting information in their signage in each park. That would go a long way to making it accessible to the hip hop dance troupe in the Bronx

who might want to permit a park space for a performance, but have no previous experience or relationship.

Second there are financial barriers. While the permit for free events is affordable, the fees jump astronomically if the group wants to find a way to charge for the event or even pass the hat. I propose that the Parks Department look at the system set up for Open Culture. The event must be available and free to the public, but a group is able to charge their audience in advance, or post a venmo address for donations, or pass the hat. There is no blockage of visibility or passage for the public, as is necessary for our community public places, but there are avenues for arts groups to bring in income to pay their artists and costs.

Finally the Open Culture program also has a hardship waiver for insurance; here again it would be great for the Parks Department to follow suit and make performing in the parks democratic and accessible by all the city's communities and cultural groups.

In this way, NYC can fill its parks with the culture our communities are craving. We can allow hard hit arts groups to generate income they desperately need. And we can set the standard for the world on how to heal, recover, and thrive with arts and culture for every citizen. Thank you for all your work.

Parks Committee
Hearing on NYC Parks Event Permits
City Parks Foundation Testimony

I'm Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks Foundation, a nonprofit that leads free sports, arts, environmental education and community building programs that encourage 300,000 New Yorkers to use and care for their neighborhood parks and green spaces each year.

As a programmer, we apply for hundreds of permits each year. Let me say right upfront that the NYC Parks team handling permits is incredibly dedicated and does everything they can to accommodate all of our requests, which are many. For SummerStage in Central Park, we offer 45 or more free events each year. Our license agreement with the Parks Department states no more than 40% of our events can be closed to the public and/or fee-based. When we do rent the venue for either private or paid-ticketed events, that money is used to directly subsidize our free concerts. This arrangement helps make our free SummerStage shows possible and we are enormously grateful to the agency for allowing us to maintain these funds.

Typically festivals of our size and stature book their concerts at least a year in advance, so we are already talking now with artists for the summer of 2022. The current permitting system won't allow for permit approval until January of each year, which is at least six months after we start booking shows. We are taking risks every time we confirm an artist before the permit process catches up, which makes it difficult to remain competitive in the marketplace -- whether for free performances or those planned by our for-profit promoter partners who have ticket sales at stake. We have already lost several shows next year because the dates could not be confirmed this far in advance.

As the co-manager of Partnerships for Parks, we work with hundreds of volunteer community groups each year to plan service days, community events and activities in parks. Let me stress how important it will be to fully fund both maintenance staff and PEP officers in this year's budget, because they are essential to the success of the many events held by our volunteer groups. What's more, many of these events were previously funded by member designated grants through the Parks Equity Initiative, which puts funding straight into parks and communities, so I hope the council will restore funding to that important initiative.

Most of these volunteer groups are not incorporated, and the cost of insurance, when required, can be prohibitive. But more concerning is that if a group is holding an event in a park, and a member of the public gets hurt in the park and decides to sue the city, those individual volunteers who were in the park that day, whether or not they had anything to do with the patron's accident, can be held personally liable because they are not backed up by an incorporated organization.

NYC Parks is very careful to facilitate public-private relationships and really takes care of its partners, so if the city's goal is to encourage community engagement and support for parks, which I think is critical, there are a number of bureaucratic challenges that, if addressed, could create a more positive and encouraging environment for volunteers and nonprofits.



575 Grand Street, #E901
New York, NY 10002
Contact@friendsofcorlears.org
www.friendsofcorlears.org

Hon. Peter Koo, Chair
NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
Councilmembers: Rivera, Levine, Dinowitz, Riley, Gjonaj, Moya, Gennaro, Van Bramer, Holden,
Brooks-Powers, Ulrich, Diaz, Brannan, Borelli

June 19, 2021

Dear Chairperson and Council Members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation
Re: Testimony for the Oversight Hearing on the Process for Events Permitting at Parks

Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony on behalf of Friends of Corlears Hook Park. Founded in October of 2014, Friends of Corlears Hook Park is a 501c3 volunteer group that works to maintain and revitalize Corlears Hook Park for the benefit of the general public and residents of the Lower East Side. We accomplish our work by planning and organizing park clean-up and planting events, providing community programming in the park, raising funds to support park programs and initiatives, and collaborating with other government agencies, non-profit organizations and community groups for the betterment of the park.

We would like to thank our Councilmember Carlina Rivera for supporting Parks, such as Corlears Hook Park, in her district.

We strongly believe that the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation is underfunded and has been for many years. Friends of Corlears Hook Park happily joins the Play Fair Coalition in their efforts to correct this matter. We would like to share with you some challenges we face in the permitting process and some examples of how poor and improper maintenance of our park directly effects our ability to provide safe programming for the community and neighborhood:

- Corlears Hook Park is in a remarkably diverse section of the Lower East Side that includes a large Orthodox Jewish population. For this reason, we try to avoid hosting events on the Sabbath. This raises a problem for us as the Parks Department has designated our park as a “No Amplified Sound” park for Sundays. Anytime we submit a permit for any type of event (puppet show, dance or music performance) that requires even the simplest of amplified sound it is automatically denied. We have asked parks numerous times to revisit this designation to no avail, hence severely limiting our ability to bring events to the community.
- Lack of maintenance staffing and proper mowing equipment leave our lawns un-mowed for weeks during the warmer weather months. During these months we run free health programs (yoga and Tai Chi classes) for the community but the tall grass makes it all but impossible for the community to enjoy the classes since mosquitos and other insects use the tall grass as a breeding ground. The tall grass also makes it hard for class participants to keep proper steady balance as it creates an uneven surface when an exercise mat is laid on top of it. When our lawns do finally get mowed it is often with a small push mower more suitable for a 500 square foot front lawn of a suburban house than a 4.3-acre park that is at least over 2 acres of lawns.

Friends of Corlears Hook Park is a non-profit, volunteer group that works to maintain and revitalize Corlears Hook Park for the benefit of Lower East Side residents and visitors. Tax ID #47-3832182

- Our spray shower area has not worked in over a decade and the drainage is clogged making it yet another breeding ground for mosquitos as every time it rains water pools in the area and sits there for days slowly draining. The constant mosquito problem makes it very unenjoyable for people participating in events in the park.

To address these issues, plus issues in other parks throughout NYC, we strongly feel that each park over 3 acres in size should have a dedicated parks maintenance staff whose sole responsibility is the care and maintenance of that park. Currently parks maintenance staff are spread thin covering multiple parks throughout the city. They also lack the proper tools and equipment to effectively care for parks in an appropriate way.

Friends of Corlears Hook Park fully support the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and its efforts to maintain and improve all parks in NYC and believes that it is important to the future of our borough that we fund our Parks properly.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Michael T. Marino', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Michael T. Marino
President



Testimony Submitted by
Sarah McCollum Williams, Executive Director, Green Guerillas
Before the NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

**Oversight Hearing on the Process for Events Permitting at Parks in the Shadow of
COVID-19**
June 23, 2021

My name is Sarah McCollum Williams and I am the Executive Director of Green Guerillas, a non-profit organization that supports community gardeners and activates youth engaged in Food Justice across the City. Thank you to Chairman Koo and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for holding today's oversight hearing and the opportunity to submit this testimony. We are grateful to the Council for its support in restoring NYC's Parks budget.

Community gardeners do essential, life-nurturing work to heal the soil, to foster connection with nature, to act for Food Justice, to preserve and protect the health of their families and neighbors. Oftentimes, community gardens are hubs for community events -- food distributions, resource sharing days, performances, picnics, and workshops of all types. We ask that events held in community gardens be indemnified through the city. Not doing so creates an additional, heavy burden for community members who want to volunteer and provide programming -- the opposite of what the city needs right now.

Please consider restoring \$8M for Nature and Resiliency in this year's Play Fair platform to support community gardens, forests, trails, and wetlands. These green spaces have gotten heavy and consistent use over the past year in particular.

We join with our colleagues in the PlayFair Coalition to urge the City to restore full funding for the Parks Equity Initiative after last year's budget cuts. Further, we ask the City to increase their support for community gardens as essential infrastructure for neighborhood food production, rest and respite, and environmental benefit - and to offer community-affirming funding to ensure that they can continue to enrich communities across the City. Thank you for your time.



Hunters Point Parks

CONSERVANCY

June 23, 2021

Testimony submitted by Casey Chamberlain, Director
on behalf of Hunters Point Parks Conservancy

re: NYC Council Parks Committee

Oversight Hearing on the Process for Events Permitting at Parks in the Shadow of COVID-19

On behalf of the Hunters Point Parks Conservancy (HPPC), a community park non-profit organization in Long Island City, Queens, I would first like to thank the New York City Council for your support of restoring NYC Parks' budget, and for supporting our city's open green spaces in general. I would also like to state my appreciation for the council hosting this hearing and acknowledging that issues to exist with the current NYC Parks permitting process.

With so many events happening in parks as the city reopens, the permitting process must be supported by a robust NYC Parks budget and staff and should be standardized across boroughs. For a small park non-profit such as ours, we rely heavily on our free public events to spread the word about our work, drum up interest in our volunteer projects, and recruit donors and sponsors. Since we do not have a license agreement with the city, we follow the same standard permitting process as any other organization that would like to host an event in the park. Because of the strain on the parks permitting division with the influx of applications, we often have to wait months until our events are approved. This puts a significant strain on our work as it limits our ability to try to recruit sponsors, coordinate with our event partners, and properly promote events. Additional resources put into the parks permitting process by the city could help out a lot of groups like ours.

In addition, in Hunter's Point South Park we are currently dealing with additional restrictions from NYC Parks that has led to some devastating effects regarding our events. We have a fairly unique situation in the park where there is a concessionaire that has an event space that is part of the park. In past years, HPPC hosted many of our free community events there. It provided the perfect location for us, as there is one section that is shaded for our children's events, there is one section that has a lot of tables for our art events, and another section that has a large open space that is great for dance and fitness events. Unfortunately, after several years of allowing us to hold events there (with just needing approval from the concessionaire, LIC Landing), the rules seemed to change on us in 2019. And now it seems they've changed again.



Hunters Point Parks

CONSERVANCY

We are no longer allowed to use the shaded space or the picnic table space at all. And if we want to use the “event space” (the flat open area), we are now being required to pay market rate for it. I understand that a lot of these restrictions are spelled out in contracts with the concessionaires, and I fully understand the reasoning behind them. However, I feel community organizations that have long-running partnerships with NYC Parks such as ours, should be given a little bit of flexibility when it comes to both event permitting, and events in concession spaces.

Separately from the permitting issue, I would also like to take a moment to ask the council for the following, on behalf of the Play Fair Coalition:

- The \$8M for Nature and Resiliency in this year’s Play Fair platform must be restored to support GreenThumb gardens, forests, trails, and wetlands – they have gotten a lot of use in the last year and we need to reiterate this ask urgently to the Council!
- The Parks Equity Initiative, which helps small groups host events and programs, must also be restored
- Funds to restore PEP, Urban Park Rangers, and to ensure good maintenance are necessary for successful events and safe, clean, and accessible parks.

Thank you for your time.

Oversight - The Process for Events Permitting at Parks in the Shadow of COVID-19.

My name is Melissa Riker, I am the Artistic Director of Kinesis Project dance theatre, the Executive Director of EstroGenius Festival, Founder of Dance Rising Collective and Co-Director of Women in Motion - the thread between all of these efforts is advocacy for artists in need of a visible platform.

As director and choreographer of Kinesis Project, I create large-scale outdoor public performances - we bring highly crafted dance directly to the public of NYC, we promote accessibility of the arts via proximity to the art. We work and perform without stages so we flow well through public spaces, with the public.

Our partnerships with the parks and institutions of New York have been varied. From simple permitted performances to more official presentations by Parks foundations or city institutions, we love bringing our work to public spaces in New York City.

I am here as an advocate for free public art work, for accessibility for all, and to acknowledge that dance is a viable public art.

However, in the pandemic wake of performing artists' income streams closing suddenly and unable to make an income for over a year - there must be a way to follow the Open Culture model and allow for tickets, public access and donations on the spot.

Would the City consider bringing together busking permits and event permits and streamlining how that request can be made?

There isn't enough grant money in the city to pay all of the artists that lost work to share their art in the city parks. I propose allowing artists to diversify how they can create their income via a permitting process that allows for the work to be accessible to all, but has ticket sales prior to the event, and donations during.

Perhaps there could be a task force put together to determine best practices moving forward.

As an artist who regularly works in the parks, I would be happy to be a part of the conversation. Additionally, I propose Lucy Sexton, NY4CA, Alejandra Duque Cifuentes, Dance/NYC, Randi Berry, Indie Theatre Fund and Anne Haïtt, Opera on Tap to be invited into conversation as well.

Thank you

--

Melissa Riker

908-370-2027 | Artistic Director/Choreographer | www.kinesisproject.com

NAISNY Dance AiR5 | SUPPORT DANCE [HERE](#)

Large-Scale Out-Door DANCE in Public Spaces

[DANCE RISING NYC: Video Tour\(Still Dancing\)](#)



Testimonial: Committee on Parks and Recreation

June 23, 2021

Testimony By: Alison Ettinger-DeLong, Development & Marketing Associate at Marine Park Alliance

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today. I am Alison Ettinger-DeLong and I work for Marine Park Alliance, caring for Marine Park in southern Brooklyn. I am providing this testimony on behalf of the organization.

At 798 acres, Marine Park is the largest City property in Brooklyn. As is true for all city parks, use has dramatically increased during the pandemic. We are delighted to see more people discover all that our park has to offer. Additionally, we would like to acknowledge and express our gratitude to the City Council's support in restoring NYC Parks' budget.

There are four major issues that were previously challenging and that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, especially with the summer months bringing more visitors:

Garbage -- With increased use, our tonnage of litter has also increased significantly. We've also seen an uptick of illegal construction debris dumping in our park.

Ecology -- Because the nature trails are more crowded than ever, visitors walk off-trail, trampling plantings and creating new and harmful pathways. This has been especially destructive near the Salt Marsh Nature Center, reversing the success of a multi-year, multi-million dollar program to stabilize the ecology. **We ask you to restore the \$8M for Nature and Resiliency in this year's Play Fair platform to support GreenThumb gardens, forests, trails, and wetlands. Maintaining and preserving our natural areas in Marine Park is crucial.**

Staffing -- We need a full restoration of Parks staffing. Marine Park has only 12 dedicated staff members, while significantly smaller Brooklyn parks have more staff to cover less acreage. Additionally, Marine Park lost its full time supervisor, without explanation, and suffers for it. Volunteers and hiring teens for summer jobs are inadequate replacements for full time staff. We also need PEP officers to assist our staff, as well as keep the park safe and clean.

Private Support -- Large volunteer groups and corporate funding have been cut due to the pandemic and other competing priorities. These sources of labor and funding were critical to the upkeep and maintenance of Marine Park and are sorely missed.

Numerous studies have shown that parks are essential to the mental and physical health of urban communities. We must restore the full Parks Department budget to support the healing power of parks throughout the city, now and in the future.

Thank you.

Dear City Council,

I'm a resident of the east village for more than forty years. I'm a writer a poet and an educator. I've followed the completely undemocratic process of the planned closure of East River Park. There's a shortage of parks in this city and especially in low income and neighborhoods that are predominantly POC. The NYCHA housing across the street from East River Park has been kept in the dark about the real process of the ESCR project. They are endlessly cited as who ESCR is for but their voices except for tenant leaders whose voices are easily politicized by public servants who support ESCR are no where to be heard. They have submitted thousands of petitions against the plan, they have marched and recently are going to the polls. We, who care about our neighborhood, have been asking for an oversight meeting on this plan rather than ramming it through. It is a ghost of the departing administration. Heat is the number one killer in NYC yet you are allowing the removal of 1000 trees next to FDR. As a New Yorker I know a 3 or 4 year project is a 10 year project and it is already over budget. We need real oversight on this plan by an outside reviewer, state or federal and not leaving it in the city government's non transparent agenda which is fiercely trying to push through this poorly considered plan.

Thanks,

Eileen Myles



**New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
Oversight Hearing on the Process for Events Permitting at Parks in the Shadow of COVID-**

19

June 23, 2021

Jessica Saab, Advocacy and Communications Project Manager

Good afternoon. My name is Jessica Saab, and I am the Advocacy and Communications Project Manager of New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). We want to thank the City Council for its strong commitment to restoring essential parks workers positions in the preliminary budget response this year and thank Chair Koo for hosting this hearing and inviting us to speak. The Council's commitment to supporting the badly needed staffing levels for CPWs, PEP officers, and Urban Park Rangers is essential to helping our park system rebound.

Over the last year, our city's parks became the safest, and at some points, the only places to gather in community. NYC communities have a rich history of volunteering in their parks and, this year, that was stronger than ever. We work with grassroots volunteer groups every day who take care of their parks in different ways, from cleaning them, to planting them, to programming them. However, during a season with devastating budget cuts, it remained difficult and unnecessarily complicated for volunteer groups to do their work. Principal among the issues is that of indemnification. The city indemnifies many of the groups that volunteer through the 'It's My Park' program but does not indemnify many other grassroots organizations that care for parks citywide. This forces groups to get their own insurance, a burden too large and expensive, causing many of these groups to give up – the exact opposite of what NYC needs right now. In addition, there is often confusion due to each borough having a different permitting process. This should all be streamlined, made easier for the citizens that are volunteering their time, especially now as parks have played such a significant role in our lives.

I also want to take this opportunity to talk about two related budget items we hope the Council will restore. We urge leaders to restore \$4M to the Parks Equity Initiative, which gives funds directly to over 600 small volunteer groups and is a critical lifeline for many small parks throughout the city with dedicated volunteers hoping to make essential improvements. \$8M must also be restored to maintain our city's natural areas and wetlands, as well as adequately fund GreenThumb and our city's community gardens.

The NYC Parks Department is always asked to do more with less. It is urgent to restore the full budget to ensure parks are safe, clean, and accessible to all New Yorkers, whether part of a small volunteer groups hoping to put on events for their communities or every day New Yorkers who are just enjoying being outdoors. Thank you.

###

For over 100 years, [New Yorkers for Parks](http://www.ny4p.org) (NY4P) has built, protected, and promoted parks and open spaces in New York City. Today, NY4P is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods.
www.ny4p.org



Testimony to
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION
Regarding
Funding to Adequately Maintain and Nurture New York City's Public Parks
Kathryn Heintz
Executive Director, New York City Audubon
June 23, 2021

NYCAUDUBON.ORG

Thank you Chair Koo and thank you committee members for sharing our commitment to a healthy and green New York City.

My name is Kathryn Heintz, and I am the Executive Director of New York City Audubon. We are a science-based conservation organization whose mission is to protect the 350-plus bird species—almost a third of all the species in North America—amounting to millions of individual birds that live in or pass through New York City each year. Some forty percent of the Atlantic Flyway's bird species are species of conservation need, some threatened, and some even endangered. Protecting these birds and their habitats improves the health and quality of life of all New Yorkers as all humans benefit from clean air, clean water, and clean green space, and yes, this includes Forever Wild areas and buffers that are critically important to safeguard.

Millions of birds, like our millions of city dwellers, depend upon New York City Parks maintaining and protecting our urban parks and natural areas to survive and thrive. These birds fly for thousands of miles each spring and fall before resting here temporarily, feeding on native plants and insects. Wintering waterfowl depend upon clean waterways and wetlands. Summer residents forage here to feed and fledge their young in our city parks. And coastal nesters rely upon clean, undisturbed, and invasive-predator-free beaches.

During these challenging times of COVID-19, more New Yorkers than ever are flocking to our parks and beaches. New York City Parks continue to be our shared refuge. But increased use warrants greater care and maintenance. Engagement, supervision, and fair, equitable, and adequate enforcement by PEP and Urban Park Rangers are also essential to safe, clean, and welcoming green spaces—for birds and for people. Large, unplanned and unpermitted gatherings that leave excess garbage, hot charcoal, dogs roaming off leash in natural areas, firecrackers, ATVs, off-road bikes, and even human feet trampling where they don't belong cause real and lasting damage.

We stand proudly with New Yorkers for Parks and the Natural Areas Conservancy in demanding adequate funding for the New York City Parks expense budget.

- Please, restore essential funds for PEP, Urban Park Rangers, and horticultural and maintenance staff.
- Please also restore the Parks Equity Initiative, which helps small groups like ours host inclusive events and programs for our communities.
- And please, please, restore the \$8 million dollars for Nature and Resiliency in this year's Play Fair platform to support GreenThumb gardens, forests, trails, and wetlands.

Our city's health depends up on it.

Thank you for this opportunity to advocate on behalf of our membership and millions of birds.



**Testimony of Carlos Castell Croke
Associate for NYC Programs
New York League of Conservation Voters**

**City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
June 23, 2021**

Good afternoon, my name is Carlos Castell Croke and I am the Associate for New York City Programs at the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV). NYLCV represents over 30,000 members in New York City and we are committed to advancing a sustainability agenda that will make our people, our neighborhoods, and our economy healthier and more resilient. I would like to thank Chair Koo and all of the Council Members on the committee for the opportunity to testify today.

NYLCV supports a Fiscal Year 22 City budget that bolsters an equitable permitting process and protects our parks overall. Our city is on the road to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is incumbent upon our elected leaders to invest our tax dollars in climate action and solutions that protect our people and public spaces.

Parks and other green spaces are one of the city's most valuable environmental assets and are a major source of the city's urban canopy, which mitigates climate change, provides clean air and habitats for native wildlife, and contributes to the well-being of our residents and economy. Preserving these spaces is a top priority for NYLCV.

But over the past year, through the hardships of the pandemic, we have seen the cleanliness and safety of our parks drop significantly due to unfair budgetary cuts to staffing and programs, which also impacts access to parks for people most in need.

Therefore, in this critical 3rd year of our play fair campaign, we are thankful that the council has voiced support for our plea to restore \$78.9 million in the FY22 Parks budget to ensure our parks are safe, clean and accessible. From our platform, I would like to specifically highlight the \$4M for the Parks Equity Initiative, the \$9M for PEP and Urban Park Rangers, and the \$8M for Nature and Resiliency that are all absolutely critical for parks safety and operations.

The COVID-19 crisis is still placing stress on our economy and communities. This was apparent in the FY21 budget but does not need to be the case again this year now that the federal government has provided relief. We urge the Mayor and City Council to have foresight and prepare for the climate crisis by making permanent commitments to environmental investments and to parks.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Riverside Park Conservancy

Riverside Park Conservancy's mission is to restore, maintain, and improve Riverside Park in partnership with the City of New York for the enjoyment and benefit of all New Yorkers. We support the preservation of the park's historic landscape, structures, and monuments, engage the community in active stewardship of the park, and provide a wide range of public programs. We also have 60 acres of natural woodlands.

The Conservancy was very happy to learn of the City Council's efforts to restore funding for the Parks Play Fair Initiative. As part of that restoration package, Riverside Park Conservancy urgently requests the restoration of \$8M for Nature and Resiliency be included.

We view Riverside Park – and all urban green spaces – as essential New York City infrastructure. Providing adequate, ongoing care helps ensure the ecological and social health of not only our local community, but also of the city as a whole.

That is why responsibility to care for NYC Parks must extend into its natural areas. Natural areas in NYC are as essential to New Yorkers as any other area of parkland, but they require specialized care and planning. Without funding, natural areas can quickly become problematic. In addition to deleterious environmental impacts, abandoned natural areas create space for dumping, hide safety concerns such as damaged trees, and allow acreage of precious NYC parkland to be perceived as unacceptable for use by the public.

NYC's forested areas today are at a critical tipping point, constantly threatened by invasive plants, garbage dumping, and environmental pollution. There are hundreds of underutilized, neglected acres -- even including overlooked spaces along exit ramps or near train tracks – that should be improved and utilized to create valuable connections between fragmented habitats and neighborhoods. There is great potential for all urban green spaces to function as an interconnected network of different natural habitats that will support one another in vital ways.

We ask the City Council to recognize our forests for the essential functions they provide to New York City while understanding that they are not self-perpetuating systems. Given the harsh urban conditions in which they exist – compounded by the reality of climate change – urban forests need to be embraced as a crucial 21st Century infrastructure investment. We hope you will take the immediate opportunity to restore \$8M in for Nature and Resiliency that was envisioned in the original Play Fair package.

Board of Trustees

Dan Garodnick
President & Chief
Executive Officer

Micah Lasher
Chair

Gene Boxer
Vice Chair

Margaret Holen
Vice Chair

Adam Zoia
Treasurer

April Lane Benson
Secretary

Lori Lennon Bassman
Victoria Benitez
Deborah Brown
Susan Curtis
Stephen R. DiPrima
Robert J. Epstein
David Goldstick
Peter J. Hornick
Andrea Krantz

Josh Lehrer
Lisa K. Lippman
John L. Masciallino
Jane McIntosh
Elizabeth A. McNamara
Catherine Morrison Golden
Mary Frances Shaughnessy
Joseph Tansey
Robert L. Weigel

Ex Officio

Gale A. Brewer
Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP
William T. Castro
John Herrold
Park Administrator &
Senior Advisor



Stacy Papas, Executive Director
Friends of the East River Esplanade
Testimony on Parks Permitting
June 23, 2021

Thank you to the council for your support in restoring NYC Parks' budget. With so many events happening as the city reopens, the permitting process must also be supported by a budget that includes much needed staffing and procedures that should be standardized across boroughs.

The event permitting process is is easy to submit until one receives 3 pages of safety protocols that are not up to date with lifted Covid safety protocols and as of 6/16, Parks still requires that an organization must sign off on and agree to perform these measures. However, Yankee Stadium and Madison Square Garden can have 15,000 people attend free from all previous safety protocols.

It takes Parks an inconsistent number of days or weeks to approve a permit leaving organizations in limbo during the review process. As Chairman Koo pointed out, the length of time spent waiting for approval has caused my organization to cancel events and withdraw permits for events as small as 20 people and as large as 100. The online status for a submitted permit simply states "under review" with no indication of good faith effort to approve or reason for lengthy review time. In addition, sound permits are obtained through NYPD and not until a week before the event, at which time Parks can deny or contradict the sound permit as issued by NYPD.

The permitting process for volunteer activities is the same. It takes 30 days for approval and because of short-staffing, submitted permits are often forgotten requiring multiple rounds of follow-up by the organizer. Volunteer activities require lead time to allow for sign up, are weather driven and seasonal, and require material support from Parks. Alternatively, there is no opportunity to create a last minute project to address a pressing need like weeding or litter pick up. Volunteering is an activity encouraged by Parks but is prohibitive to organize based on the permitting process.

Please incorporate supportive staffing measures so that communities can actively enjoy and care for the Parks they love.