NEW YORKERS FOR PARKS

The Report Card on Beaches 2007

An Independent Assessment of New York City's Public Beaches

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The Report Card on Beaches

The Report Card on Beaches, modeled after New Yorkers for Parks' award-winning *Report Card on Parks*, provides communities with quantitative performance data on the seven public beaches operated and managed by the City's Parks Department. In short, it tells New Yorkers how well beaches are maintained in four key service areas: shorelines, pathways, bathrooms and drinking fountains. Located in four of the five boroughs, these urban public beaches offer relief from the summer heat and provide unique recreation opportunities. *The Report Card on Beaches* is an effort to highlight these important facilities and ensure that New York City's 14 miles of beaches are open, clean, and safe.

In 2003, New Yorkers for Parks released its first *Report Card on Parks*, designed to track trends in neighborhood park conditions, highlight successes, identify consistent challenges, and enhance the park policy discussion. Since 2003, *The Report Card* has been a catalyst for change in New York City's park system. New Yorkers for Parks' *Report Card on Beaches* is the first independent, citywide evaluation of the maintenance of New York City's public beaches. Similar to *The Report Card on Parks*, our aim is to highlight the successes and effectively bring about targeted improvements to New York City's beaches.

***The Report Card on Beaches* has the following goals:**

1 **To provide city residents with an assessment of how each of the seven beaches is performing in comparison to each other.** This easily accessible online information helps communities advocate for improved services for their beaches.

2 **To provide an independent assessment of beach performance from year to year against a defined minimum level of service.** This creates accountability for providing both this defined level of service as well as improvements for every beach.

3 **To spark debate among communities, public agencies and advocates about how best to maintain and improve public beaches in need.** *The Report Card on Beaches* provides a valuable service by identifying those beaches in greatest need, but more importantly, *The Report Card* indicates how we might begin to address that need.

4 **To highlight high- and low-performing beaches, as well as systemic issues, in order to identify and implement best practices citywide.**

The Report Card on Beaches vs. the Parks Inspection Program

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) evaluates its properties using a nationally recognized comprehensive program, the Parks Inspection Program (PIP). While PIP rates sites from a park management perspective, the survey used in *The Report Card* was designed from the park user's perspective. By listing ratings and feature performance by the beach, New Yorkers for Parks' *Report Card* is intended to provide a comparative analysis of beach conditions as an easy-to-use tool for communities.

In addition, the two inspection programs evaluate parks in different ways. For example, *The Report Card* rates and scores bathrooms and drinking fountains. Although the Parks Department tracks these features through PIP, they do not influence a beach's rating, nor are the results of these inspections made public, other than at the citywide level. Recently, the department began posting PIP ratings on its website, but improvements are needed to make the data more user-friendly (see sidebar).

Every summer the Health Department inspects public beach facilities, including bathrooms, to ensure that they comply with the health code. The results are posted on its website throughout the summer, as well as in an annual report in October. The agency also monitors water quality and provides this data online. This is a great example of transparent performance reporting that benefits the community.

New Yorkers for Parks' community outreach efforts have shown that many communities throughout the five boroughs are frustrated with the conditions of public beaches. New Yorkers rely on beaches for recreation and relaxation, and the lack of maintenance and staffing can result in closed shorelines, clogged and broken drinking fountains, and littered boardwalks. New York City's public beaches are retreats for New Yorkers—and they deserve better.

Reporting on Beach Performance: The Parks Inspection Program (PIP)

In 2005, DPR began providing individual park and beach inspection data on its website due to legislation passed by the New York City Council. While the provision of this data is an essential first step, the following improvements would make PIP results much more useful to communities:

- **PIP results should be easy to find online.** A link to PIP results should be made available on the front page of the DPR website. Today, a constituent must search for information about a specific park or beach in order to see a link to inspection results. Even those New Yorkers who are aware that PIP results exist online still find it difficult to locate information on their local beach because the data is obscured within the DPR website.

- **PIP results should be centrally located.** Currently, PIP data is presented in various ways on multiple websites. A user searching for inspection results for a specific beach can find them on the DPR website. PIP results aggregated by community board can be found on the Mayor's Office of Operations website. Citywide results are available in the annual *Mayor's Management Report* (a publication evaluating the performance of each city agency). These various presentations of the data should be centrally located and easy to access on the Parks Department's website to allow for meaningful comparisons at the beach, community board, and borough levels.

- **PIP evaluations should be explicitly tied to resource deployment.** Currently, information on DPR spending is not linked to PIP results. In order to make effective budget decisions, council members and constituents must be able to determine how financial resources impact park and beach performance. For example, the DPR could provide the amount of maintenance dollars spent to hire seasonal staff over time alongside the percentage of "acceptable" cleanliness ratings, so that the public can determine whether or not sufficient funding is being provided. The *Mayor's Management Report* would be a good forum for this type of information.

Why a *Report Card on Beaches*?

Waterfront access in New York City is precious, and the 14 miles of public beaches offer some of the few points along the shoreline where any New Yorker can jump in the water and swim. Beaches also afford opportunities for boating, birding, strolling, surfing, and relaxing. The Parks Department is responsible for ensuring that beaches are clean, safe and available for public use. *The Report Card on Beaches* highlights and monitors this important component of the Parks Department's inventory, and the results show that our beaches need additional care.

Through our outreach efforts, New Yorkers for Parks has heard from residents who are passionate about the conditions of public beaches. An online survey conducted in 2006 with eTown-Panel, a project of Baruch College's School of Public Affairs, found that New Yorkers use their beaches as often as their national counterparts but are more likely to complain that their local beach is crowded, noisy, dirty, unsafe, or closed. In addition, New Yorkers rated most features of local beaches lower than survey participants throughout the country and specifically had issues with drinking fountains and bathrooms.

In the 2007 Community District Needs statements, community boards voiced opinions on neighborhood beaches. Queens Community Board 14, which includes Rockaway Beach, the largest city beach, states:

"The local parks' staff has done an admirable job with very little resources but more help is still needed. The boardwalk must be continuously maintained, the restrooms along the boardwalk must be completely rebuilt… Finally, something must be done to end the life-guard shortage. All sections of Rockaways beaches must remain open."

Similarly, Brooklyn Community Board 13, which includes Coney Island/ Brighton Beach, the city's most popular beach, states:

"Beaches must be cleared of debris daily during many months of the year. Work must be done to maintain the wooden planks and benches of the boardwalk where trip hazards pose a threat."

Other community boards discuss the need for additional bathroom facilities, repairs to boardwalks and promenades, increased safety officers, and continued attention to beach services. *The Report Card on Beaches* is a tool for communities to advocate for improved beach conditions.

Summary of Methodology

This report is intended to build on the New Yorkers for Parks *Report Card on Parks* implemented in 2003. Below is a summary of the methodology constructed for *The Report Card on Beaches*; a full discussion of the methodology can be found in the "Detailed Methodology" section of this report.

Survey Population

In constructing *The Report Card on Beaches*, New Yorkers for Parks focused on the seven DPR "beach" properties. All seven beaches included in the Parks Department's Property List were evaluated in the survey. Due to the large size of the beaches, an evaluation of the total acreage of every property was not feasible using New Yorkers for Parks' rigorous data collection process. To address this challenge, New Yorkers for Parks used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to divide each beach property into transects 50 yards wide, which corresponds with the Health Department's requirements for lifeguard placement along the beach. The project statistician then randomly selected 10% of these transects to be surveyed on the "Shoreline" and "Pathways" Major Service Areas (MSAs). Every drinking fountain and bathroom at the seven beaches was evaluated, whether or not it fell within a selected transect.

Grading the Beaches

The survey design team defined four Major Service Areas (MSAs) based on those developed for *The Report Card on Parks*. For the creation of *The Report Card on Parks*, a focus group of park experts and community leaders was convened to help define eight MSAs, along with a scale of weights to reflect the relative importance of different indicators. MSAs were weighted on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the most important to a park user's experience). In order to ensure comparison of beach survey results to park survey results, the same MSA weights were used in *The Report Card on Beaches*, with the addition of a weight of "5" for the Shoreline form. A Beaches Advisory Group[1] was convened to assist in the development of the Shoreline form.

The four MSAs were evaluated on maintenance, cleanliness, safety and structural integrity. Thus, for each of the seven beaches included in the survey, every applicable MSA was assigned a numerical score. A beach's overall numerical score was calculated as a weighted average of these service area scores. Grades for *The Report Card on Beaches* ranged from 36% to 73%. New Yorkers for Parks translated these scores into three relative categories: Satisfactory (70% to 79%), Challenged (60% to 69%) and Unsatisfactory (59% and below).

Each beach was assigned a numerical score from 0 to 100 in each applicable MSA, based on the proportion of features in those service areas found to be in acceptable condition. This was done using an independently developed survey mechanism that is based on the DPR's Parks Inspection Program (PIP). (Those beaches lacking one or more of the MSAs were not penalized.) Letter grades corresponding to these numerical scores comprise the final MSA ratings in accordance with the following conversion table:

Raw Numerical Grade	*Letter Grade*
97-100	A+
93-96	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
60-69	D
59 and below	F

Score/Grade associations developed by a focus group of park managers and open space experts for The Report Card on Parks.

The survey is designed to fairly rate all features that are or should be available to a user visiting a particular beach. By way of example, if a beach has a bathroom facility that is locked or closed without explanation, it will receive a "0" for the bathroom rating. However, if the beach does not have a bathroom, it will not receive a score for bathrooms, so a beach will never be penalized for not having a particular Major Service Area. Although New Yorkers for Parks tracked whether or not a lifeguard was present at a given shoreline, this measure did not impact the beach's grade.

[1] *The Beaches Advisory Group was made up of Joel Banslaben, executive director, Coastal Marine Resource Center; Jeanne Dupont, Rockaway Waterfront Alliance; Sean Ghio, director of Project and Performance Management, Connecticut United Way; Don Riepe, Jamaica Bay Guardian.*

Survey Mechanism

To determine a beach's rating, New Yorkers for Parks uses a comprehensive survey mechanism based on that which was developed specifically for *The Report Card on Parks*. *The Report Card on Beaches* survey mechanism includes Drinking Fountain, Bathroom, and Pathway forms that are identical to the 2007 *Report Card on Parks* feature forms, and in addition, includes a Shoreline form developed specifically for this project. Surveyors complete a survey form for sections of Pathway and Shoreline found within the selected transect at a beach. In addition, every drinking fountain and bathroom along the beach or boardwalk is surveyed, whether or not it is located within the transect. For example, if there are ten drinking fountains on a beach, a surveyor completes ten Drinking Fountain forms. Surveyors answer a series of questions on the maintenance, cleanliness, safety and structural integrity of a feature.

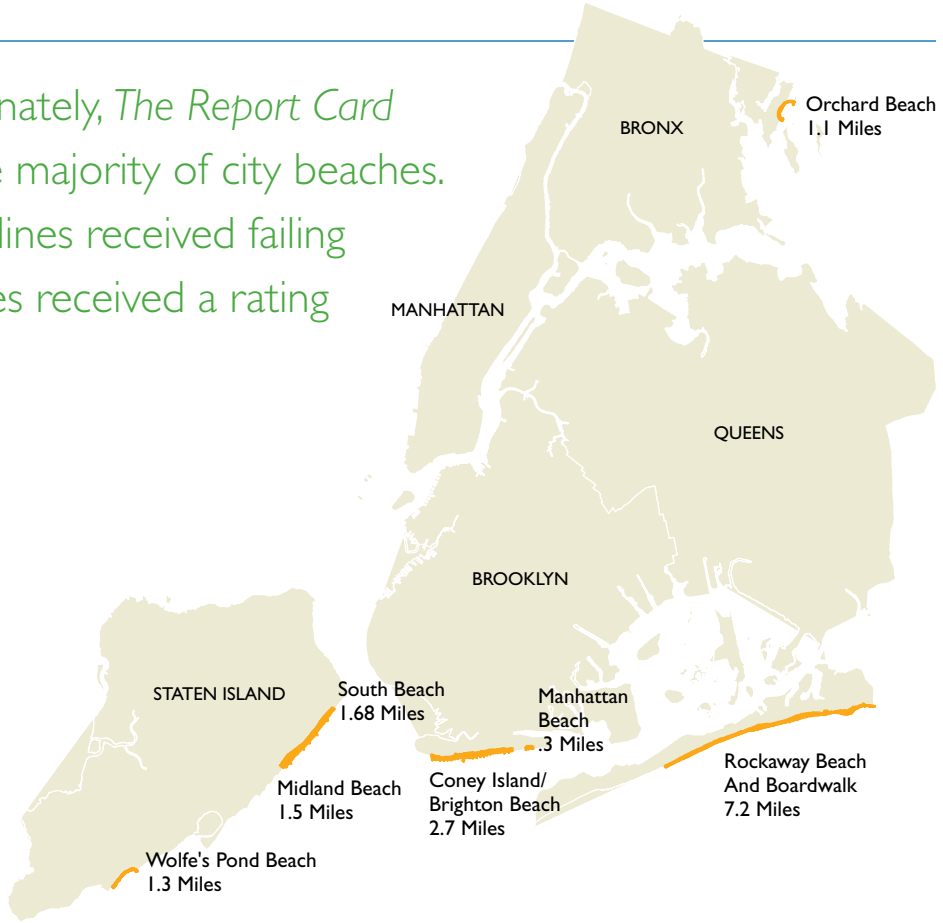
Survey Work

Finally, New Yorkers for Parks staff conducted the survey Tuesdays through Fridays in July and August 2006, a high-use season for public beaches. Teams of trained surveyors used measuring wheels and GIS maps to locate and measure each randomly selected 50-yard transect. Handheld computers and digital cameras were used to complete the evaluations. For each MSA evaluated, digital photographs were taken; both survey forms and photos are stored as documentation of survey efforts and results.

Major Service Area		*Description*	*Weight*
Bathrooms		This MSA evaluates each discrete bathroom or comfort station along the beach or boardwalk.	4
Drinking Fountains		This MSA evaluates each discrete drinking fountain along the beach or boardwalk.	3
Pathways		This MSA evaluates each type of walkway or boardwalk at the beach, including wood, asphalt, turf or concrete.	3
Shoreline		This MSA evaluates the sand shoreline at the beach, starting from where the water meets the sand.	5

Findings

Overall, beach performance is poor. Unfortunately, *The Report Card on Beaches* has documented poor conditions at the majority of city beaches. In particular, too many drinking fountains and shorelines received failing grades, and as the chart below shows, more beaches received a rating of "Challenged" than any other rating.



There is a disparity in conditions within single beach properties, as well as among the seven beaches.
The Report Card on Beaches finds that disparate conditions exist not only among various beach properties but within the same property as well. Along a single beach, vastly different levels of service are provided, and a beach user's experience depends on the area they choose to visit. Certain sections may be closed or littered with debris, while others may be staffed with a lifeguard and in very good condition.

Some features exhibit disparate conditions across the seven beaches. While pathways tend to perform well and drinking fountains tend to perform poorly at all beaches, bathrooms exhibited grades ranging from "F" to "A." Shorelines also received a wide range of grades, from "F" to "B-".

Targeted maintenance strategies are successful.
Coney Island/Brighton Beach and Rockaway Beach both show evidence of targeted maintenance strategies. The best-performing shoreline areas are adjacent to the best-performing pathways in both of these sites. Where the shoreline is free of litter and broken glass and is staffed with lifeguards, the boardwalk is well maintained with no weeds or raised boards. Conversely, the poor-performing shoreline areas tend to be adjacent to poor-performing pathways.

Borough	*Beach Name*	*Rating*	*City Council District*	*Community Board*	*Mileage*
Staten Island	MIDLAND BEACH	SATISFACTORY	50	2	1.5
Brooklyn	MANHATTAN BEACH	CHALLENGED	48	15	0.3
Bronx	ORCHARD BEACH	CHALLENGED	13	10	1.1
Staten Island	SOUTH BEACH	CHALLENGED	50	2	1.7
Queens	ROCKAWAY BEACH	CHALLENGED	31, 32	14	7.2
Brooklyn	CONEY ISLAND/BRIGHTON BEACH	UNSATISFACTORY	47, 48	13	2.7
Staten Island	WOLFE'S POND BEACH	UNSATISFACTORY	51	3	1.3

The Parks Department does a good job of focusing its maintenance efforts on those sections of the beach that are open to the public and supervised by lifeguards. However, every section of pathway and shoreline should be equally well maintained. While communities all across the city depend on beaches for recreation, those that are adjacent to the beaches use them on a regular basis and should be able to depend on clean and safe conditions in their area.

Pathways perform at a high level.

"Pathways" was the highest-scoring MSA in the survey, earning an average of 83% (B). Every beach's pathways scored a "C" or better, and pathways at Orchard Beach and South Beach earned an impressive "A-". In general, boardwalks and other paths were free of litter, glass, and graffiti, and in most cases, benches were in good condition. Maintenance was the biggest challenge for beach boardwalks and pathways, with more than three-quarters of maintenance work rated "unacceptable," for needed or shoddy repairs. Multiple instances of dangerous rotting or missing boards were noted.

These results are similar to the results of the 2007 *Report Card on Parks*, which identified pathways as one of the highest-rated MSAs in neighborhood parks.

Bathrooms exhibit mediocre performance.

Beach bathrooms rated only a "D" (62%), with 17% of bathrooms locked and not open to the public this summer. The 2007 *Report Card on Parks* found that only 6% of park bathrooms were locked to the public, and neighborhood park bathrooms received a score of 72% (C-), which is significantly higher than beach bathrooms. Challenges noted at beach bathrooms include broken stall door locks and a lack of toilet paper, soap, and paper towels or hand dryers.

However, several beaches scored very well on the "Bathrooms" feature. Orchard Beach and South Beach bathrooms scored a 91% (A-), showing that the Parks Department has been able to effectively manage this feature and should utilize similar strategies at other beaches in the city. Visitors to every beach should be able to count on open, clean bathrooms.

Shorelines are too frequently littered or closed.

While Manhattan Beach, Rockaway Beach, and Midland Beach scored in the "C-" to "B-" range for their shorelines, the other four sites all received failing grades. Unfortunately, the most common issues affecting shorelines were excessive broken glass and litter, found at 53% and 42% of surveyed shorelines, respectively.

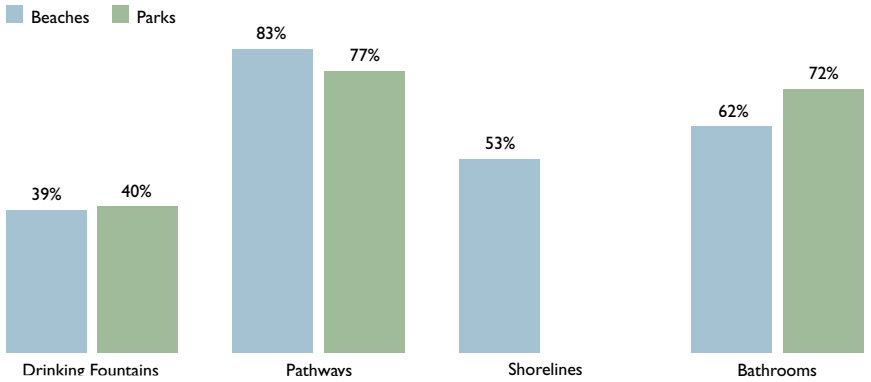
Litter and broken glass present unsafe conditions at public beaches. Broken glass on the beach, where the public expects to safely walk barefoot, is unacceptable. Some of the litter found at city beaches is a result of Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs), which dump untreated wastewater and sewage into our waterways. Due to CSOs, items that have been flushed down the toilet can end up on city beaches. CSOs present a long-term challenge for the City. In the meantime, sufficient maintenance must be provided to ensure that beaches are free from all types of litter.

In addition, 32% of surveyed shorelines had no lifeguards. This does not include those areas of the beach that are off-limits to protect nesting birds. In 9% of cases, shorelines were not marked with signage indicating that they were closed to swimmers and waders, endangering those unaware of the rules. Sufficient lifeguard staffing would ensure that nonprotected areas of the beach are always open and safely accessible.

Drinking fountains are unacceptable.

Maintaining working, sanitary drinking fountains has been an ongoing challenge for the Parks Department. Beach drinking fountains received a 39% (F). In every year of *The Report Card on Parks*, "Drinking Fountains" has been one of the lowest-scoring MSAs, and in 2007, drinking fountains in neighborhood parks were given a score of 40%, almost identical to the performance of drinking fountains on beaches. Even when beach users can turn on a drinking fountain, they are frequently met with unsafe and unsanitary conditions such as damaged or missing equipment, leaks, and needed maintenance. These problems must be addressed.

Average Score for Each Major Service Area (MSA) in Beaches and Neighborhood Parks



Results by Beach

This section offers a profile of results for each of the seven beaches surveyed in *The Report Card on Beaches*. Feature scores illustrate the specifics of performance at each site.

Coney Island/Brighton Beach – *Unsatisfactory*

Coney Island and Brighton Beach stretch for 2.7 miles, from West 37th Street to Corbin Place.[2] These beaches face the Atlantic Ocean and are easily accessible by several subway and bus lines. Coney Island/Brighton Beach is the most popular city beach and received more than 15 million visitors in 2006.[3]

The area's colorful history as a seaside resort and amusement park is legendary. By 1920 the subway connected Coney Island to the rest of the city, and its beach became an extremely popular summer destination. Beach improvements, including the construction of the boardwalk and the addition of sand, began in 1921, once the City secured the title to the beachfront. In 1938, Coney Island's beach was transferred to the Parks Department, widened to serve more people, and extended to meet Brighton Beach in the east.

In recent years, Coney Island has experienced a veritable renaissance, as it has become host to the Mermaid Parade, the music festival SirenFest, and a minor league baseball team, the Brooklyn Cyclones, at Keystone Park. Following the recent sale of 14 acres of boardwalk land to major developer Thor Equities, communities citywide are debating how Coney Island's future should look. A likely increase in residents will result in an increased demand for clean and safe beaches.

Pathways and bathrooms at the beach scored fairly well, but drinking fountains and shorelines performed poorly.

Successes

The Coney Island and Brighton Beach boardwalk was relatively safe with no broken glass found and benches intact and safe.

Beach bathrooms were 95% open and available for use. The toilets and sinks were typically in working order, and bathrooms were free of graffiti.

Challenges

All sections of the shoreline surveyed were open for use, but unfortunately excessive broken glass was found at 40% of transects. Excessive litter also impacted 40% of surveyed areas. These negative conditions had a significant impact on the shoreline score for this beach.

Although pathways scored well, one-quarter suffered from wooden boards that were raised or missing, causing potential trip hazards. Maintenance issues including spilled paint and loose nails should be addressed.

Report Card

Feature	*Score*	*Grade*
Shoreline	39%	F
Pathways	81%	B-
Bathrooms	70%	C-
Drinking Fountains	32%	F

[2] *DPR. "Coney Island Beach & Boardwalk." Retrieved March 2006 from http://gis.nyc.gov/parks/lc/NYCParkSearch.do?geocodeID=1.*
[3] *Department of Parks and Recreation testimony, City Council Oversight Hearing on "Managing the Erosion of City Beach Properties," held by the Committee on Waterfronts.16 Jan 2007.*

Manhattan Beach – *Challenged*

Located east of Brighton Beach, Manhattan Beach is secluded and primarily serves the adjacent neighborhood. Created on a salt marsh by a real estate developer in the mid-19th century, Manhattan Beach was transferred to the city Parks Department in 1951. Today, it offers a quiet alternative to Coney Island. A playground and several baseball fields add to the recreational opportunities in the area.[4] The U-shaped beach is less than a mile long and had 1 million visitors in 2006.[5]

Successes

Although some maintenance repairs were needed, Manhattan Beach's pathways were free of litter, broken glass, and weeds. This was the highest-scoring feature at the beach.

The shoreline at Manhattan Beach also performed relatively well. Beyond the consistent challenge of litter, the beach was in excellent condition, providing open, safe beaches for public use.

Bathrooms at Manhattan Beach performed above the citywide average, receiving 75%. Some damaged equipment was found, including stall doors, locks, and sinks, but bathrooms were open for use and generally provided toilet paper and paper towels.

Challenges

Manhattan Beach's drinking fountains were the lowest scoring in the city. Leaks, clogs, and nonfunctioning fountains were all found, as well as damaged spigots and structures. Drinking fountains are a consistent challenge for the Parks Department to maintain.

Report Card

Feature	*Score*	*Grade*
Shoreline	75%	C
Pathways	84%	B
Bathrooms	75%	C
Drinking Fountains	11%	F

[4] *DPR. "Manhattan Beach Park." Retrieved March 2006 from http://gis.nyc.gov/parks/lc/NYCParkSearch.do.*

[5] *Department of Parks and Recreation testimony, City Council Oversight Hearing on "Managing the Erosion of City Beach Properties," held by the Committee on Waterfronts. 16 Jan 2007.*

Midland Beach – *Satisfactory*

Adjacent to South Beach, Midland Beach is approximately 1.5 miles long and is the highest-performing site on *The Report Card on Beaches*. The two beaches are on the Lower New York Bay and together stretch for approximately three miles. There are a few Staten Island Railroad stations near the beaches, but the walking distance from these stops is quite far.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these beach communities resembled Coney Island, with hotels, amusement parks, and casinos. In the late 1920s, the Depression, as well as fires and polluted water, caused a sharp decline in beach visitors. The Franklin D. Roosevelt Boardwalk was constructed in 1935 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and named after the program's founder. The fourth longest in the world, the 2.5-mile-long boardwalk spans South and Midland beaches.[6] In 2006, nearly 300,000 visitors spent time at the two beaches.[7]

Successes

The shoreline at Midland Beach was the best performing of all seven beaches. One out of the five sections surveyed was closed with no lifeguard on duty, but entryways were safe, trash cans had been emptied, and the presence of litter was minimal.

Drinking fountains, though they still performed poorly, were the highest scoring of any beach. The primary challenges were structural damage and sloppy repairs.

Challenges

Pathways are typically a high performing feature, and although they scored fairly well, Midland Beach's boardwalk and asphalt path were in need of repair. Missing, raised, and sunken sections of pathways were common, and roots or weeds affected safety at several areas as well.

Bathrooms at Midland Beach did not perform well. One bathroom was used as storage for a large number of desks, chairs and other items. Other challenges included damaged stall locks, and lack of soap and towels or working hand dryers.

Report Card

Feature	*Score*	*Grade*
Shoreline	82%	B-
Pathways	77%	C+
Bathrooms	65%	D
Drinking Fountains	65%	D

[6] *DPR. "FDR Boardwalk and Beach." Retrieved May 2006 from http://nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/historical_signs/hs_historical_sign.php?id=12129.*
[7] *Department of Parks and Recreation testimony, City Council Oversight Hearing on "Managing the Erosion of City Beach Properties," held by the Committee on Waterfronts. 16 Jan 2007.*

Orchard Beach – *Challenged*

The Bronx Riviera, as Orchard Beach has come to be known, is one of the most popular summer spots for residents of the Bronx and Manhattan. In 2006, an estimated 1.6 million people visited this beach.[8] Part of Pelham Bay Park, Orchard Beach was created under the orders of Robert Moses, who connected Rodman's Neck and Hunter Island with landfill and trucked in sand to build the beach on Pelham Bay. The site officially opened to the public in 1936 but was not fully completed until 1947.[9] Today, the beach is 1.1 miles long and is reachable by bus or car.

Like South Beach, performance of its four features varied widely.

Successes

Similar to South Beach, bathrooms and pathways at Orchard Beach scored very well, both earning grades of "A-." Bathrooms were open and clean, with very little damage. Pathways were safe with no missing sections or holes, offering beach users a safe walkway.

Challenges

Again, similar to South Beach, drinking fountains performed at the level of fountains in parks across the city. Leaking fountains were common, and unsanitary conditions such as algae were found in basins.

The shoreline was the lowest-scoring feature at Orchard Beach. One of the shoreline sections surveyed was closed and roped off, preventing public access. Litter and broken glass were found at 75% of surveyed shorelines, and deterioration along the entranceways was noted.

Report Card

Feature	*Score*	*Grade*
Shoreline	34%	F
Pathways	90%	A-
Bathrooms	91%	A-
Drinking Fountains	45%	F

[8] *Department of Parks and Recreation testimony, City Council Oversight Hearing on "Managing the Erosion of City Beach Properties", held by the Committee on Waterfronts.16 Jan 2007.*
[9] *DPR. "Orchard Beach." Retrieved March 2006 from http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/historical_signs/hs_historical_sign.php?id=12110.*

Rockaway Beach – *Challenged*

Located along the Rockaway Peninsula, Rockaway Beach faces the Atlantic Ocean and, stretching a full seven miles, is the longest of the city's beaches. In 2006, the beach had 2.1 million visitors.[10] Rockaway Beach extends from Beach 3rd Street to Beach 149th Street. The length of property includes a boardwalk in most sections, and the A train makes several stops along the beach. The Rockaway Gateway Greenway links Brooklyn to the Rockaway Peninsula so that cyclists and pedestrians can more safely access the site.[11]

In the mid to late 19th century, developers began to transform the uninhabited peninsula into a vacation community for wealthy New Yorkers. Parks Commissioner Robert Moses improved transportation connectivity between the peninsula and mainland Queens in the 1930s, which caused an increase in permanent, year-round residents. The Parks Department acquired the beach from the City by charter in 1938, along with Coney Island (Brooklyn) and South Beach (Staten Island).[12]

While its shoreline and pathways scored fairly well, bathrooms and drinking fountains exhibited many challenges.

Successes

Rockaway Beach's shoreline was one of the higher performing in the city, earning a 70% (C-). Several of the surveyed transects were cordoned off to protect nesting birds.

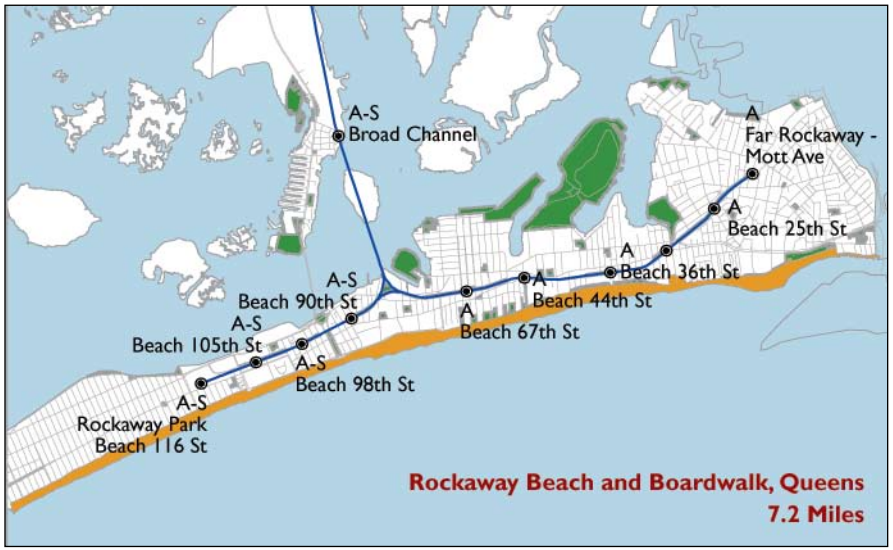
Challenges

Although shorelines scored relatively well, broken glass and litter were too frequently found, and nearly one-quarter of surveyed transects had no lifeguard on duty.

Rockaway Beach bathrooms performed poorly, with 40% closed with no signage explaining why. According to the Parks Department, some of these bathrooms are deemed inoperable pending future development. Of those bathrooms that were open and available for use, soap, toilet paper, and paper towels were a rarity, unavailable in more than half the sites.

Although pathways earned a 75% (C), these were the lowest scoring of any beach in the city. Weeds and missing or raised sections were common.

Similar to their performance citywide, drinking fountains frequently exhibited unsanitary or unsafe conditions, and nearly one-third had severe leaks.



Report Card

Feature	*Score*	*Grade*
Shoreline	70%	C-
Pathways	75%	C
Bathrooms	45%	F
Drinking Fountains	31%	F

[10] *Department of Parks and Recreation testimony, City Council Oversight Hearing on "Managing the Erosion of City Beach Properties," held by the Committee on Waterfronts. 16 Jan 2007.* [11] *DPR. "Where to Ride." Retrieved April 2006 from http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_things_to_do/facilities/af_bike_where_to_ride.html#rockawaygw.* [12] *DPR. "Rockaway Beach." Retrieved March 2006 from http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/historical_signs/hs_historical_sign.php?id=7719.*

South Beach – *Challenged*

South Beach is adjacent to Midland Beach and contains a newly renovated boardwalk. More information on the site is available in the "Midland Beach" section of this report. Performance of its four features varied widely.

Successes

The new boardwalk at South Beach tied with Orchard Beach as the highest scoring pathway in the city, earning a 90% (A-). Very few cracks, loose boards, or missing sections were noted, and the pathways were clear of broken glass and litter.

The bathrooms at South Beach were extremely well maintained, and were the highest scoring in the city at 91% (A-). Bathrooms were open with very little damage on stalls, toilets, or sinks, providing safe and clean facilities.

Although drinking fountains at South Beach scored poorly, similar to fountains at other city beaches, very few problems were noted. Of the two drinking fountains that were surveyed, one was in perfect condition and one had excessive debris in the basin.

Challenges

The shoreline at South Beach was one of the lowest scoring in the city. Of surveyed shorelines, 40% had no lifeguard on duty and no signage indicating that the beach was closed to swimming. Litter and broken glass were consistent challenges, and entranceways were damaged and rusty, requiring repairs.

Drinking fountains at South Beach scored poorly, similar to fountains at other city beaches. The primary challenge was unsanitary debris found in the basin.

Report Card

Feature	*Score*	*Grade*
Shoreline	36%	F
Pathways	90%	A-
Bathrooms	91%	A-
Drinking Fountains	50%	F

Wolfe's Pond Beach – *Unsatisfactory*

Wolfe's Pond Beach is a part of the park of the same name on the southeastern coast of Staten Island on the Raritan Bay. The city acquired the land for this park in 1929 and undertook substantial projects to improve the park in 1933. A playground and other facilities were built, along with stairs leading to the beach. During the summer of 2006, approximately 50,000 people visited Wolfe's Pond Beach.[13]

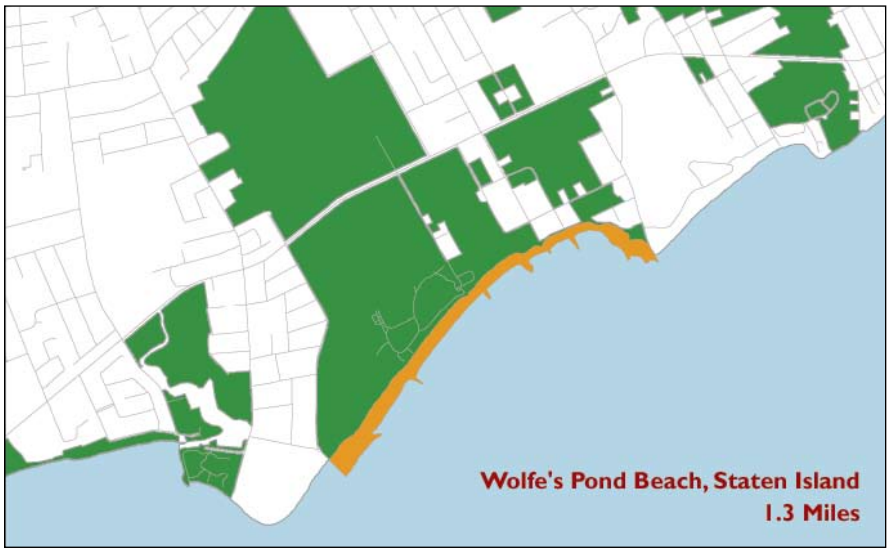
Successes

Wolfe's Pond's pathways scored on par with other beaches surveyed. The pathway was in good condition overall and safe to use. Overflowing trash cans negatively impacted the score.

Although the shoreline performed very poorly, the section that was open for use by the public scored very highly, showing that the Parks Department targets maintenance to ensure safe conditions for beachgoers. All areas of Wolfe's Pond Beach should be maintained to this standard.

Challenges

The beach bathroom was closed and locked to the public, preventing access.[14] Unfortunately, the shoreline scored very poorly as well. Two areas surveyed received a failing grade due to large, excessive debris and broken glass, which endanger the safety of beach visitors. In addition, there was no signage to prevent swimming at the closed sections of the beach.



Report Card

Feature	*Score*	*Grade*
Shoreline	38%	F
Pathways	80%	B-
Bathrooms	0%	F
Drinking Fountains	N/A	

[13] *Department of Parks and Recreation testimony, City Council Oversight Hearing on "Managing the Erosion of City Beach Properties," held by the Committee on Waterfronts. 16 Jan 2007.*
[14] *In some instances, beach patrons are served by adjacent park bathrooms.*

Conclusions and Recommendations

The 2007 *Report Card on Beaches* shows that disparate conditions exist among and within New York City's beaches. Targeted maintenance strategies work to ensure that the sections of the beach that are open to the public are adjacent to the highest-performing pathways and boardwalks, providing a safe and fun experience for beach visitors. However, too often, New Yorkers find sections of the beach littered or closed due to a lack of lifeguards. These consistent challenges must be addressed.

New Yorkers for Parks offers the following recommendations to improve the conditions of our seven public beaches:

1 **Reduce litter on public beaches by increasing seasonal staff and combating sewer overflows.**

Excessive litter is a chronic condition on our city beaches. Increased seasonal staff is needed to keep up with cleaning during the busy summer season. In addition, the City must address the challenge of Combined Sewer Overflows, which dump an average of 520 million gallons of untreated sewage into our waterways every week. These overflow events lead to increased litter on city beaches and severely diminish water quality. By addressing this issue, the City can work to ensure that every beach is clean, well maintained, and safe.

2 **Create a long-term strategy for the recruitment and retention of lifeguards.**

New Yorkers for Parks' inspections show that 32% of surveyed shoreline areas were closed to the public due to the lack of lifeguard staffing. Unfortunately, the Parks Department faces significant challenges in recruiting sufficient staff to provide a safe swimming experience for all beachgoers. As discussed in the New Yorkers for Parks position paper, "Raising the Tide: Strategies for New York City Beaches," the Parks Department should work with the Department of Education to ensure that class credit is given to students who take swimming classes. Other potential strategies to improve lifeguard recruitment and retention include offering competitive salaries, continuing and enhancing free swimming programs for youth, ensuring a transparent training and hiring process, and implementing best practices from other cities.

3 **Implement targeted maintenance strategies to ensure that bathrooms are open to the public and in good condition.**

The Parks Department's targeted maintenance program, "Operation Relief," has markedly improved the conditions of park bathrooms in recent years, as evidenced by the *Report Card on Parks*. The department should use this model to address the poor conditions of beach bathrooms. By ensuring that all bathrooms are open for use during operating hours, the Parks Department would significantly improve the performance of this feature. Of the 17% of beach bathrooms that were closed and inaccessible, several appeared to be in need of renovation and capital improvements. Such projects should be funded so that sufficient bathroom access is provided to all beachgoers.

Detailed Methodology

This section describes in detail the methodology used by New Yorkers for Parks in creating *The Report Card on Beaches*. The methodology is broken down into seven sections:

- Selection of the survey population
- Identification and weighting of major service areas
- Feature forms: structure of the survey instrument
- Assignment of numerical scores
- Conversion from numerical scores to letter grades
- Sample calculation: Midland Beach, Staten Island
- Conduction of the survey

Selection of the Survey Population

In constructing *The Report Card on Beaches*, New Yorkers for Parks focused on the seven DPR "beach" properties. All seven beaches included in the Parks Department's Property List were evaluated in the survey. Due to the large size of the beaches, an evaluation of the total acreage of every property was not feasible using New Yorkers for Parks' rigorous data collection process. To address this challenge, New Yorkers for Parks used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to divide each beach property into transects 50 yards wide, which corresponds with the Health Department's requirements for lifeguard placement along the beach and enabled New Yorkers for Parks to track the staffing of the beach. The project statistician then randomly selected 10% of these transects to be surveyed on the "Shoreline" and "Pathways" Major Service Areas (MSAs). Every drinking fountain and bathroom on the seven beaches was evaluated, whether or not it fell within a selected transect.

Identification of Major Service Areas

In constructing *The Report Card on Beaches*, New Yorkers for Parks used a user-focused approach to choose four major service areas (MSAs) based on those selected for *The Report Card on Parks*. Of the eight MSAs measured through *The Report Card on Parks*, three are included in *The Report Card on Beaches*: Bathrooms, Drinking Fountains, and Pathways. For the creation of *The Report Card on Parks*, New Yorkers for Parks convened a group of 10 community leaders and elected officials to weight the relative importance of each MSA. Participants as well as park users at Brooklyn's Prospect Park were asked to rate the MSAs on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the least important to their park experience, and 5 being the most important. Participants also provided feedback on the structure and composition of the MSAs. In order to be able to compare beach survey results to park survey results, the same MSA weights were used in *The Report Card on Beaches*, with the addition of a weight of "5" for the Shoreline form. In constructing the Shoreline feature form, a Beaches Advisory Group was convened to provide feedback on form questions from the user's perspective. The rankings provided were then averaged and rounded to the nearest whole number to provide a final MSA relative weight figure:

Figure 1: Major Service Areas and Relative Weights

Shoreline	5
Bathrooms	4
Drinking fountains	3
Boardwalks and pathways	3

Participants in *The Report Card on Parks*' 'First Focus Group' included Councilmember Joseph Addabbo, Jr., former Chair, Parks Committee, New York City Council; Matt Arnn, United States Forest Service, Director, Metropolitan Initiative, NYC; John Ameroso, Cornell Cooperative Extension, New York City; Skip Blumberg, Friends of City Hall Park; Frank Chaney, Community Board member; Jim Dowell, Riverside Park Fund, Manhattan Parks and Green Space Coalition; Susan Marraccini, Turnaround Friends, Inc.; Martin Olesh, Friends of Cunningham Park; Robert Pasqual, Queens Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces; and Gene Russianoff, Senior Attorney, New York Public Interest Research Group.

Participants in the "Beaches Advisory Group" included Joel Banslaben, Executive Director, Coastal Marine Resource Center; Jeanne Dupont, Rockaway Waterfront Alliance; Sean Ghio, Director of Project and Performance Management, Connecticut Policy and Economic Council; and Don Riepe, Jamaica Bay Guardian and American Littoral Society.

Feature Forms: Structure of Survey Instrument

The structure of the survey instrument replicates that of *The Report Card on Parks*. New Yorkers for Parks staff, in cooperation with statistical consultants from the firm of Ernst & Young, developed question forms for *The Report Card on Parks* with which to evaluate the MSAs found in each park. Individual questions were designed to measure the performance of the MSAs in each of the following categories:

- Maintenance;
- Cleanliness;
- Safety; and
- Structural Integrity.

Whenever possible, the form questions were adapted from DPR's own internal evaluation mechanism, the Parks Inspection Program (PIP). The form questions for the Shoreline form were adapted from established *Report Card on Parks* feature forms, including the "Waterbodies", "Natural Areas", and "Lawns" forms, as well as research on beach evaluations conducted by other groups. During the construction of *The Report Card on Parks*, a second focus group was convened to provide relative weights to individual feature forms on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the least important to their park experience, and 5 being the most important. Next, the focus group was asked to designate each of the individual form questions as 'priority' or 'routine.' Priority ratings refer to those conditions of a park feature necessary for its safe use. Finally, the focus group rated questions tagged as routine on a scale from 1 to 5. The survey design team followed this same protocol for the Shoreline feature form, relying heavily on the results of focus group research used in the creation of *The Report Card on Parks*. Participants in the 'Second Focus Group' included four park and advocacy experts: Mark Caserta, Director, Waterfront Park Coalition, New York League of Conservation Voters; Susan Craine, Consumer Advocate, New York Public Interest Research Group; Neysa Pranger, Coordinator, Straphangers Campaign; and Paul Sawyer, Executive Director, Friends of Van Cortlandt Park.

Assignment of Numerical Scores

Each completed form was assigned a numerical grade between 0 and 100. Any beach feature receiving an 'unacceptable' rating on any priority question was assigned a form grade of zero. However, in the large majority of completed forms, beach features received only 'acceptable' ratings to all priority questions. In these cases, the calculation appears as follows:

Let A denote the sum of the relative weights of routine survey questions receiving "acceptable" ratings. Let B denote the sum of the relative weights of routine survey questions receiving either "acceptable" or "unacceptable" ratings. Each form's final numerical score is then 100 times the quotient or A divided by B. No form score was assigned a beach which lacked any given feature; in this way no beach was penalized for not having any of the survey's 4 feature types.

All non-priority questions were scored as *acceptable*, *not acceptable* or *not applicable*. Following the guidelines of the focus group, each applicable form question was assigned a weight of one to five. Scores were calculated as the weighted ratio of questions scored acceptable to those scored acceptable or unacceptable. This number was then multiplied by 100 to give a final form score.

Forms of four types were averaged to give four MSA scores. No MSA rating was assigned to a beach which lacked any given major service area; in this way no beach was penalized for not having any of the survey's four major service area types.

Each beach's raw score was calculated in a similar fashion. MSAs present for any given beach were weighted following the guidelines of the focus groups. These weighted figures were then averaged to give an overall beach score.

Conversion of Numerical Scores to Letter Grades

To maintain consistency and comparability, the grade conversion system for *The Report Card on Beaches* is based on that of *The Report Card on Parks*. During the creation of *The Report Card on Parks*, a fourth focus group was convened to determine the assignment of letter grades to raw scores, consisting of park managers and open space experts. Participants were brought to three parks in Manhattan and asked to provide a letter grade for the park based on a brief description of the MSAs and a tour of the park. These letter grades were consistent with the raw number scores for the parks and resulted in the raw score/grade assignment chart. Grades for *The Report Card on Beaches* ranged from 36% to 73%. New Yorkers for Parks translated these scores into three relative categories: Satisfactory (70% to 79%), Challenged (60% to 69%), and Unsatisfactory (59% and below).

Figure 2: Conversion from Raw Scores to Letter Grades

Raw Numerical Grade	*Letter Grade*
97-100	A+
93-96	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
60-69	D
59 and below	F

'Fourth Focus Group' participants included Jerome Barth, Director, Bryant Park Restoration Corporation; Charles McKinney, consultant, former administrator, Riverside Park; and Andy Stone, Director, NYC Programs, Trust for Public Land.

Sample Calculation—Midland Beach

Figure 3 shows actual surveyor responses for Midland Beach in Staten Island. Figures 3 and 4 below include a summary of form data and the subsequent MSA and beach score.

Conduction of the Survey

Survey work for *The Report Card on Beaches* took place Tuesdays through Fridays in July and August 2006 from the hours of 10 AM to dusk. New Yorkers for Parks trained 5 surveyors (all staff members) to complete the survey work. New Yorkers for Parks senior staff held one full-day training session during summer 2006 to train surveyors in the following techniques: use of the handheld computers, delineation of beach features and transects, use of maps, measuring wheels, survey forms and standards manual, and procedures for documenting features with digital cameras. The training session included the step-by-step review of beach surveying, collection of data according to defined standards, proper photo documentation, safety procedures, and procedures for storing data in *The Report Card* database upon completion of survey.

In the field, surveyors completed a feature form for each pathway and shoreline feature that was included in the selected transect. In addition, every drinking fountain and bathroom located on the beach or boardwalk was evaluated. For example, for every drinking fountain on a beach, a 'Drinking Fountain' form was completed so that on a beach with ten drinking fountains, a surveyor would complete ten 'Drinking Fountain' feature forms. If five transects were randomly selected for a given beach, five 'Shoreline' forms were completed for those transects.

In addition to the completion of the survey forms, surveyors took extensive digital photographs to support and complement survey results. All survey findings and feature forms receive an identification number and are correlated to a series of photographs documenting conditions for each beach in the survey. Survey results and photo documentation are stored in a central database. When photo documentation did not correlate with results or did not adequately illustrate beach conditions, the beach was re-visited and re-evaluated by surveyors.

In addition to completing feature forms, surveyors took extensive digital photographs to support and complement the survey results. All survey findings and feature forms receive an identification number and are correlated to a series of photographs documenting conditions for each park in the survey. Survey results and photo documentation are stored in a central database. When photo documentation did not correlate with results or did not adequately illustrate park conditions, the park was revisited and reevaluated by surveyors.

Figure 3: Summary of Midland Beach Form and MSA Data

Form	*Form Scores*	*MSA Score*
Shoreline	100, 100, 83, 63, 63	82
Bathrooms	100, 83, 79, 0	65
Drinking Fountains	100, 100, 86, 86, 86, 71, 71, 71, 68, 68, 68, 54, 54, 0, 0	65
Pathways	90, 83, 76, 76, 63	77

Figure 4: Calculation of Raw Score and Letter Grade—Midland Beach

MSA	*MSA Score times Weight*
Beaches	82 * 5 = 408 (with rounding)
Bathrooms	65 * 4 = 262 (with rounding)
Drinking Fountains	65 * 3 = 196 (with rounding)
Boardwalks and Pathways	77 * 3 = 232 (with rounding)
Total	**1099 (with rounding)**

This total, 1099, was then divided by the sum of the weights of the four MSAs. This sum is 15, so that the Midland Beach raw score is then 1099/15 = 73.0.

Applying this numerical score to the relative categories on the previous page, it can be seen that a score of 73 corresponds to a rating of "Satisfactory".

New Yorkers for Parks

New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P) is the only independent watchdog for all the city's parks, beaches and playgrounds. The city's oldest and leading independent expert on park conditions, efficiency and funding, NY4P has worked for nearly 100 years to ensure greener, safer, cleaner parks for all New Yorkers.

Through our website and publications like the annual, award-winning *Report Card on Parks*, NY4P provides accurate, up-to-date information on conditions in New York City's neighborhood parks. And through our policies, partnerships and planning, we work to effect change on a citywide level, to promote a higher level of park service in every community.

Our work is motivated by the belief that all New Yorkers should have access to quality parks and adequate recreational opportunities, because New York City's neighborhood parks are the front and backyards for millions of New Yorkers.

Information on our research projects, publications and programs is available at www.ny4p.org.

Track Your Park

In 2006 New Yorkers for Parks launched Track Your Park (TYP), a citizen-based park inspection program for small parks, playgrounds, gardens and other open spaces. Based on *The Report Card on Parks*, TYP trains New Yorkers to survey their own parks and create inspection reports, equipping them with the tools needed to advocate for improvements. For more information, visit www.trackyourpark.org.

Parks Advocacy Day

The largest event of its kind at City Hall, New Yorkers for Parks' annual Parks Advocacy Day offers park users a chance to meet their City Council members face to face to discuss citywide and neighborhood park concerns.

Community Design Program

The Community Design Program offers pro bono design assistance to groups working to create new parkland or improve existing open space in their communities.

Position Papers

These policy reports provide in-depth analyses of park issues. The first in the series, "A New Turf War," is a comprehensive study that identifies the issues surrounding the use of synthetic turf and offers a series of recommendations on how to determine when and where synthetic turf is appropriate in New York City's parks and athletic fields. The second, "Raising the Tide: Strategies for New York City Beaches" is a companion piece to *The Report Card on Beaches*. Both can be downloaded from www.ny4p.org.

Daffodil Project

The Daffodil Project, a living 9/11 memorial, is the largest volunteer planting effort in the city. To commemorate the anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks, every fall New Yorkers for Parks—along with the Parks Department and thousands more volunteers—plant nearly 500,000 daffodil bulbs as part of The Daffodil Project. The project not only raises the spirits of New Yorkers, but it also draws attention to the needs of neglected parks and open spaces citywide.

City Council District Profiles

The City Council District Profiles document parks and open space in all 51 City Council districts, enabling New Yorkers to find out how their district rates on measures of open space, health, income, education and safety. They are an essential tool for advocating for increased green space and improved care for existing parks and playgrounds.

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