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New Yorkers for Parks Commends City Council, Mayor for Increases to Parks Department Budget

-Seasonal Services, Jobs, Maintenance Funding Added to Final Budget -

July 6, 2012 (New York, NY) – New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P), the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods, commends the Bloomberg Administration, and the New York City Council for securing targeted increases of more than \$28 million to Parks’ budget for Fiscal Year 2013. Council leadership was provided by Speaker Christine C. Quinn, Finance Committee Chair Domenic M. Recchia, Jr., and an unusual bipartisan coalition who joined us at a June 5th rally to decry proposed cuts to the Parks Department budget: Parks & Recreation Committee Chair Melissa Mark-Viverito, Brad Lander, Minority Leader James S. Oddo and Letitia James.

Among the restorations:

- A \$9.637 million restoration for summer seasonal services, including \$1.437 million for pools, \$1.0 million for playground associates, and \$7.2 million for other seasonal needs, including seasonal aides and park workers. These restorations will ensure that all municipal pools open for the full season, and that pools and playgrounds maintain regular hours;
- \$16.783 million for the Job Training Participant program, saving 845 full-time equivalent maintenance positions; and
- \$2.0 million for tree pruning, helping prevent dangerous conditions that result from insufficient tree maintenance.

“While this additional funding does not solve the Parks Department’s fiscal challenges, it is a significant stop-gap measure to help ensure that New Yorkers can continue to enjoy clean, safe parks,” said Holly Leicht, Executive Director of NY4P. “New Yorkers for Parks commends the Council and Administration not only for restoring seasonal funds, but also for saving nearly 850 maintenance jobs and bolstering essential funding for tree pruning. In recent years, there has been a disconnect between the robust capital investments being put into new and existing flagship parks and the depletion of the maintenance budget. Today’s restorations signal a positive shift to better align Parks’ capital and maintenance budgets.”

The increase in Parks Department funding between the preliminary and final FY13 budgets is greater than in recent years. According to public officials, NY4P can claim a big share of the credit, thanks to recent advocacy efforts that included a June 5th rally with Council Members and citywide parks advocates on the steps of City Hall. We also helped bring the potential dangers of insufficient tree care to light, resulting in the first increase in funding for tree pruning since 2008.

“I am happy that the City Council has once again stepped up and protected the Parks Department from the sharpest of budgetary cuts,” said Minority Leader Oddo. “While we have staved off the short-term pain, we still need to work to find sustainable sources of maintenance funding for this vital City agency. I continue to believe to do that we have to address the structural imbalances of our city’s budget. As Ed Koch famously said in 1979 after President Carter signed federal loan guarantees for New York City, ‘The struggle for a sound city is not over.’ This unexpected coalition we have crafted needs to continue to work together to bring about the much-needed fundamental changes to ensure that we sustain our glorious parks system.”

"What a great day for New York City's parks!" said Council Member Lander. "I'm thrilled that the City Council was able to work with the Bloomberg Administration to restore more than \$28 million for the parks and pools that millions of New Yorkers rely on to play, swim, run, bike, and relax. Together, we restored over 1,600 JTP participants who keep our parks safe and clean, while getting real wages and job experience. We preserved funding for playground associates and seasonal workers. And, on day that the McCarren Pool reopened after three decades, we made sure that all our public pools will be open this summer, starting today. Big thanks to Speaker Christine Quinn, Finance Chair Domenic Recchia, Parks Committee Chair Melissa Mark-Viverito, and Minority Leader Jimmy Oddo for their leadership, and to New Yorkers for Parks and other advocates for making sure that the voices of the millions of NYC parks-goers were heard loud and clear."

“As summer begins, New Yorkers can rest assured that our city’s parks will not see the severe reductions originally proposed in the Executive Budget for the coming fiscal year,” said Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito. “This historic restoration will keep all our city’s pools open for the entire summer, make sure that our parks stay clean and well maintained, and keep New Yorkers employed. In particular, I am relieved that our restorations helped the City to avoid a plan that would convert Job Training Participants (JTJs) to Work Experience Program (WEP) status. Additional funding from the Council and the Administration will also ensure that our street trees are better maintained by reducing the tree pruning cycle from 20 years to 7 years and will maintain the Council’s Playground Associates initiative which provides supervised recreation at our local playgrounds. I thank Speaker Christine Quinn, Finance Chair Domenic Recchia, the Bloomberg Administration, Commissioner Adrian Benepe and all of my colleagues, as well as New Yorkers for Parks and all of the advocates for their support.”

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For over 100 years, New Yorkers for Parks (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. We achieve this mission through an integrated approach of research, advocacy and strategic partnerships.