



**City Council Oversight Hearing: Crime Prevention in Parks
Parks Committee**

New Yorkers for Parks Testimony
January 22, 2008

Good afternoon. My name is Cheryl Huber and I am Director of Research at New Yorkers for Parks. New Yorkers for Parks is the only independent watchdog for all the city's parks, beaches, and playgrounds. For 100 years, New Yorkers for Parks has worked to ensure greener, safer, cleaner parks for all New Yorkers.

Accurate, accessible crime data is essential to increase public awareness and efficient deployment of resources. In December 2005, thanks to the City Council's support, the Mayor signed Local Law 114, requiring the NYPD to track and report on crimes that occur in the 20 largest parks in NYC. Prior to the passing of this legislation, there was no comprehensive tracking of crime in parks, other than Central Park, which has been served by its own police precinct for many years. Because crime in Central Park has always been tracked and reported, it was not one of the 20 initial sites that were tracked through this legislation.

New Yorkers for Parks would like to thank Council member Vallone's office for providing us with quarterly crime data for these 20 parks from April 2006 to September 2007. In early spring, we will issue a report providing an analysis of 18 months of data on crime in parks. We will examine the trends and highlight the need to expand this important program to track crimes in the 1,900-plus parks citywide. Today's testimony and our forthcoming report will focus on the 20 pilot parks tracked through Local Law 114.

Several important points must be considered when examining this crime data. First, it is important to remember that the pilot sample includes the four largest parks in each borough based on acreage alone. Therefore, the data provides only a snapshot of conditions and cannot be used to make assumptions regarding crime in parks citywide. Second, without park usership numbers, which the Parks Department does not collect in a statistically meaningful way, we cannot calculate the *rate of crime* in parks. A park that has one crime and 1,000 visitors tells a different story than a park that has one crime and 1,000,000 visitors. The U.S. Bureau of Justice and other agencies calculate crime *rates* to make these sorts of comparisons. Without knowing the usership of our parks in a given year, it is difficult to compare crime statistics across parks or over time.

With these factors in mind, here are some of our preliminary findings:

- Out of the 20 parks, the most crimes – 99 – were reported in Flushing Meadows Corona Park during the 18 months of the program.
- Along with Flushing Meadows Corona Park, the following parks reported the highest number of crimes during the 18 months: Prospect Park, Riverside Park, Bronx Park, and Pelham Bay Park.
- Murders were reported in four parks during the time period: Van Cortlandt Park, Prospect Park, Flushing Meadows Corona Park and Pelham Bay Park.
- A total of five rapes were reported in Flushing Meadows, Prospect, Forest, and Paerdegat Basin parks.
- Reported crimes in the 20 parks increased from spring and summer 2006 to the same time period in 2007.¹

The tools that are central to the NYPD's impressive and successful Compstat program should be utilized in our parks to increase safety. Additional resources must be channeled to the parks that are most in need as they would, through Compstat, to neighborhoods in need. We believe that the NYPD and Parks Department should continue to work together to deploy additional

¹ Between Apr-Jun 2006 and Apr-Jun 2007, total crimes in the 20 parks increased by 29%. Between Jul-Sept 2006 and Jul-Sept 2007, total crimes increased by 12%.

officers in Flushing Meadows Corona Park and others to deter criminal activity and ensure that security responses are swift and effective.

We offer the following recommendations to improve and expand this vital program:

1. Expand the program, as the legislation mandates, to track and report on crimes in the 100 largest City parks. According to the law, this should have occurred after one year. It has now been 20 months. The City Council, NYPD, and DPR should work together to ensure that this mandate is met and that crime is measured and addressed in more parks.
2. Begin mapping crimes *within* the largest parks. Today, park users and officials cannot say for certain which area of a park is experiencing the most crime. Several of the parks included in this study are significantly larger than Central Park. By locating the crimes to a specific part of the park, the NYPD and DPR will be able to efficiently deploy officers to high crime areas.
3. The City should make data on crimes in parks publicly accessible so that every park user is educated and aware of safety issues.

We also recommend that the Parks Department institute a program to measure park usership, which would have myriad benefits, including increasing the utility of this information. If we knew how many people visit Flushing Meadows Corona Park every year as compared to Cunningham Park, we would be better able to compare the number of crimes occurring in each park.

New Yorkers for Parks will continue to act as a clearinghouse for crime data as it becomes available, with the belief that public awareness will lead to increased safety in our parks. Tracking and reporting crime statistics will lead to a more effective deployment of resources to ensure public safety citywide.

Thank you.