



New York City Council, Committee on Parks and Recreation
Hearing on Proposed Introduction 384-A
Testimony of Tupper Thomas, Executive Director, New Yorkers for Parks

Good afternoon. I'm Tupper Thomas, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks, the city's independent parks research and advocacy nonprofit. I thank the committee for inviting us to talk about what we can learn from conservancies' financial records for the betterment of the whole park system.

We appreciate conservancies' work in attracting resources to the parks they support, and in creating management methods that all parks might be able to use. Conservancies combine neighborhood groups' civic energy with the capacity for institutional fundraising. New Yorkers for Parks recognizes their contributions to our city's overall park system with dollars that public sources cannot or will not provide.

At the same time, we appreciate the Council's need for thorough reporting about where conservancies get their money, and about how their funding affects the overall health of the park system. This could help dispel the notion that parks with conservancy funding redirect resources away from needier parks. New Yorkers for Parks has long held that organizations in public-private partnerships with the Parks Department should report annual revenues, expenses and other critical financial information in a simple, consistent manner to be shared on the Department's website.

The question is: how can such information stay current enough to be useful to the Council?

As it stands, conservancies create their expense budgets prior to their next fiscal year. This budget, and the final financial statements, can show where money was spent and how it was raised. There may be more user-friendly formats for this data, which the Council might explore. Listing the various sources of giving- such as individual, foundation, corporation and government- would provide transparent information on funders. Gifts totaling over a threshold amount could be listed specifically by donor. Any capital funds could be reported separately by project.

The city would need to engage as a partner in this reporting, by providing similar numbers on its spending in each park. This would help clarify what it takes to fund park operations and programming, as well as what would be necessary to keep all parks as well-maintained as the ones we are looking at today. We should remember that the conservancies' dollars support parks that draw millions of visitors from throughout the city and the world. More ways to compare conservancy spending with Parks Department spending on a park-to-park basis can help the Council assess the true cost of sustaining first-rate parks at a variety of scales. Clear, precise categories and reporting will show that conservancy support richly serves the overall parks system without a significant hit to the taxpayer.

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For over 100 years, New Yorkers for Parks 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. More information: www.ny4p.org

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