



CityParks
FOUNDATION



**Hunters
Point
Parks**
CONSERVANCY

April 27, 2020

Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez, Chair
New York City Council Committee on Transportation
City Hall
New York, NY
10007

Dear Chair Rodriguez,

The undersigned organizations submit this testimony today to the New York City Council Committee on Transportation in support of Intro. 1933, which would provide temporary access to street space for New Yorkers in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. We are seeing unprecedented pressure on our parks and open spaces. This legislation will help ensure vitally needed access to open space in neighborhoods that currently lack sufficient access to parks and gardens, or where parks are in danger of unsafe overcrowding. Open space in our dense city is critical to positive health outcomes, in good times and bad. The park and open space system provides key health benefits to New Yorkers and can be strengthened and safeguarded by opening opportunities for safe recreation in streets citywide.

As New Yorkers face the potential for a summer season in NYC without access to playgrounds, recreation centers, public pools, and beaches, we believe there will be an even higher need for this temporary street space access. As it is unclear when open space assets like playgrounds and recreation centers will be back online, we are concerned about the knock-on impacts that are and will be experienced in parks and open spaces that remain open and accessible to the public. Providing some measure of additional public open space will be critical to ensuring that the parks that do remain open can do so safely, in light of fact that parts of the open space system will likely not be available for public use during what is usually the busiest season for NYC's parks, gardens, and open spaces. To ensure that these open streets provide cooling benefits during the year's hottest months, we encourage the City to proactively expand the Fire Department of New York (FDNY) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)'s efforts to outfit fire hydrants that can be used by the public for relief.

Models for safely opened streets that still permit essential traffic have been piloted in other cities around the world during this crisis, and we thank the Council for taking leadership on this issue on behalf of New Yorkers. We believe low-enforcement models that already exist in NYC should be explored and could be expanded upon for the successful implementation of temporary street closures, such as those employed for neighborhood block parties. We are also heartened by

examples such as the closure of Shore Road adjacent to Astoria Park, which was spearheaded by local advocates as a means to make park access safer for residents of Western Queens. We believe these examples point to a model that suggests minimal impact on City employees for both the New York Police Department (NYPD) and NYC Parks. It is important that NYC Parks staff and the Parks Enforcement Patrol in particular can be deployed where they are needed most – our public parks. As we face dire budget projections for NYC Parks in the FY21 budget, we believe the need to keep our essential parks staff in parks themselves will be more important than ever.

Respectfully,



Paul R. Gottsegen
Board Chair and Acting Executive Director
New Yorkers for Parks



Connie Fishman
Executive Director
Hudson River Park Friends



Heather Lubov
Executive Director
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Rob Basch
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