



**New York City Council Committee on Finance
Executive Budget Hearing
May 25, 2021
Adam Ganser, Executive Director**

Good afternoon. My name is Adam Ganser, and I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). We are a founding member of the Play Fair Coalition, which includes over 300 organizations from across the five boroughs, many of whom will testify today. We thank the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation and the Committee on Finance for inviting us to speak about the fiscal year 2022 Preliminary Budget. I also want to thank Chair Koo for his leadership and partnership in the Play Fair Coalition.

We are here today to call on the Mayor and the City Council to Play Fair Now for parks, and restore vital funding needed to make sure our parks can support New Yorkers during this historically challenging time. Restoring \$79.8 million to the FY22 Expense Budget for NYC Parks is urgently needed to make sure our city's parks are safe, clean, and accessible for all New Yorkers.

During the last 12 months, parks have been essential for our physical and mental health, forums for protests against racial injustice, and for the cultural vibrancy of this city during lockdown. New Yorkers have gathered in our parks in unprecedented numbers.

At the same time, COVID ushered in a year of austerity budgeting. Mayor de Blasio dealt the NYC Parks Department a crushing blow in the 2020 budget – cutting the agency's funding by 14 percent, \$84 million our city parks desperately needed. This was the second largest cut to any city agency.

Parks should be drivers of equity. Unfortunately, the budget cuts have had the most severe impacts on those very communities that have been hardest hit by the pandemic.

Further, our parks staff have been essential frontline workers, without the recognition or support they deserve. The hiring freeze and budget cuts have left hundreds of parks positions hanging in the balance. The parks department has been asked to do more with much less at a time when parks and outdoor spaces are the safest places for New Yorkers to play, get fresh air, relax, and the only place to visit with friends and family outside of our households. It has never been more urgent to ensure that our parks are fully staffed and funded.

We call on the Mayor and the Council to restore the Parks Budget to provide:

- \$10 million to baseline 100 City Park Workers and 50 Gardeners;
- \$30 million to restore the NYC Parks seasonal staff budget;
- \$3 million to restore the Parks Opportunity Program;
- \$15 million to restore contracts for tree pruning, stump removal, and invasive species control;
- \$4 million to restore full funding to the Parks Equity Initiative;
- \$3 million to restore the 50 Urban Park Ranger staff lines cut last year;
- \$6 million to restore the 80 Parks Enforcement Patrol staff lines cut last year;
- \$3.4 million to restore the budget for GreenThumb;
- \$4.5 million to continue critical conservation work in our city's natural forests, wetlands, and trails.

We are also calling on the City to reverse the burdensome hiring freeze currently in place at NYC Parks, which has made it nearly impossible for the agency to replace staff when they are needed most, and already operating on the thinnest of margins.

The city budget is a statement of a city's priorities, and for decades the budget for NYC Parks has been woefully insufficient. COVID didn't create this problem – the pandemic has only brought this chronic disinvestment to a boiling point. With warmer weather just around the corner, let's make sure the City's budget this year reflects the urgency of our parks and open space needs. We look forward to working with the Council to Play Fair Now for our parks budget. Thank you.



FY22 Budget Platform

\$79.8M to Renew and Restore the Expense Budget for NYC Parks

\$58M to reinvest in critical Maintenance and Operations

- **\$10M** to baseline the FY21 one-shot 100 City Park Worker and 50 Gardener staff lines.
- **\$30M** to restore the seasonal staff budget for maintenance and operations workers citywide.
- **\$3M** to restore the Parks Opportunity Program and provide a pathway to full-time employment.
- **\$15M** to restore critical parks forestry contracts for tree pruning, stump removal and sidewalk repair, and invasive species control.

\$4M to reinvest in Recreation and Programming

- **\$4M** to restore the Parks Equity Initiative, and support park stewardship organizations citywide.

\$9M to reinvest in Parks Safety

- **\$3M** to restore the 50 Urban Park Ranger positions created in the FY20 budget.
- **\$6M** to restore the 80 Parks Enforcement Patrol positions created in the FY20 budget.

\$7.9M to reinvest in Nature and Resiliency

- **\$3.4M** to restore 15 GreenThumb staff, and expand access to plant materials, resources and tools for community gardeners citywide.
- **\$4.5M** to continue conserving and caring for our natural forests, and begin critical improvements for our City's wetlands and trails network.

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For over 100 years, [New Yorkers for Parks](http://www.ny4p.org) (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.
www.ny4p.org