



New York City Council
Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting, and Maritime Uses
Uniform Land Use Review Procedure Hearing: East Side Coastal Resiliency Project
October 3, 2019
Lynn Kelly, Executive Director

Good afternoon, my name is Lynn Kelly, and I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). I would like to thank the City Council Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting, and Maritime Uses for holding this hearing today, and for considering the public's testimony on this important project, which will have not only local impacts, but will also set the precedent for public resiliency projects citywide.

We understand that the issues up for a vote today are proposed land use actions, but we believe these proposals cannot be reasonably separated from the East Side Coastal Resiliency Project and its impacts on what is currently known as John V. Lindsay East River Park.

The City faces numerous challenges as it seeks to balance the complex engineering needs of this project with the realities of the location itself. We also understand that it is not a matter of "if" the next Superstorm Sandy happens, but "when". The need to revitalize East River Park as a public open space that can also offer flood protection is urgent and essential to the protection of residents of the East Village and Lower East Side.

East River Park currently provides nearly 46 acres of active and passive open space for the East Village and Lower East Side communities, and also acts as a vital travel corridor for bicyclists who rely on the East River Greenway. Losing a park of this size to reconstruction will have a profound impact on the communities that currently rely on it, and we applaud the City's recent announcement to phase the construction of the park.

While the City has committed resources to provide some level of mitigation for the temporary loss of this park, we think more can be done and we strongly encourage interagency coordination on these mitigation measures with agency partners at the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), the Department of Education (NYCDOE), and the Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) to find additional opportunities to provide mitigation for this sizeable interruption to neighborhood park use. It will be essential for NYC Parks to share best practices and resources to ensure that non-Parks, City-owned properties are kept to the highest standard of care.

The current proposal for rebuilding the park would involve the total loss of the canopy that exists in East River Park today. We urge NYC Parks and the NYC Department of Design and Construction (NYCDDC) to incorporate a wide range of horticultural variety in the new park, and also strongly encourage the City to plant trees that are more mature in their growth cycle.

Furthermore, NYC Parks has already made clear its commitment to neighborhood-wide street tree plantings and bioswale installations as a means of mitigation for the total loss of tree canopy in East River Park. While we commend this plan as an important infrastructure change that will provide improvements for the communities upland of the park, we believe it will be essential that the City to dedicate increased maintenance funds and resources to specifically care for these new plantings. The first few years of life for new street trees are also their most vulnerable, with a certain amount of tree mortality expected in new plantings, which makes an increase in maintenance and care for these trees more essential than usual.

Additional coordination and consideration will be needed to accommodate people on bicycles, who currently use East River Park's protected pathway. It will be essential to provide a reasonable, safe route for these cyclists to use during the period of construction, and we ask NYCDOT to work with transit advocates and the bicycling community to appropriately plan for these changes.

Finally, one of NY4P's weightiest concerns relating to public open space and parks will always be the question of long-term maintenance. For too long, New York City has failed to dedicate permanent and meaningful funding for baselined, year-round maintenance and operations staff lines. We were encouraged by the investments made by the City in the FY20 budget, but we know many of those positions are still not permanent, and will not meet the sum of tremendous needs of our parks system. As we contemplate a park renovation and rebuild on the scale, and at the cost, of the East Side Coastal Resiliency Project, we must also plan for baselined maintenance. Simply put, maintenance is a matter of protecting our capital investments, and we think any conversation about a \$1.4 billion dollar construction project is a nonstarter without an appropriate, permanent commitment to more full-time maintenance and operations staff.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak. I welcome any questions you may have.

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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.
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