



**New York City Council Committee on Finance
Executive Budget Hearing
May 21, 2020
Emily Walker, Director of Outreach & Programs**

Good afternoon. My name is Emily Walker, and I am the Director of Outreach & Programs at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). Our organization is a founding member of the Play Fair Coalition, which includes over 250 organizations citywide. We thank Speaker Johnson and the City Council Committee on Finance for allowing us to speak about the fiscal year 2021 Executive Budget.

The City Council's leadership last year secured everyday improvements for our parks, community gardens, and natural areas through the historic addition of \$44M to the FY20 Expense Budget for NYC Parks. We are grateful for the benefits that funding has provided to our public open spaces this year.

Now, we respectfully request the inclusion of an additional \$47M for NYC Parks in the upcoming Adopted FY21 expense budget. This funding will ensure that our parks remain safe, well-maintained, and provide equitable health and environmental benefits to communities across the city. Additionally, we ask that the Council help advocate to stabilize existing funding to NYC Parks and its nonprofit partners who collectively clean, maintain, and program open spaces throughout the city. It is important to note that Parks workers are deemed "essential city workers" in response to the COVID-19 crisis: they have been putting themselves on the line daily to help keep our parks clean and safe during this challenging time. As the Council knows, many of these dedicated professionals do not have job security beyond June 30th of this year. The FY20 funding added by the Council created 342 new staff lines for the agency, and we strongly believe these hard-working New Yorkers deserve the guarantee of a job on July 1st, and know that the Council can help preserve these vital positions.

The Play Fair Coalition's \$47M ask includes \$26.4M to stabilize the 342 positions created last year, which include 100 City Park Workers, 50 Gardeners, 80 PEP officers, 50 Urban Park Rangers, 47 Natural Resources Group staff, and 15 GreenThumb Outreach workers. We are also asking for \$14.8M which would help advance the Administration's goals for creating more programming opportunities in parks citywide, which we anticipate will be more needed than ever this summer as New Yorkers seek opportunities for safe recreation. Finally, our ask includes \$5.5M to provide vitally-needed maintenance and operations equipment for all 51 Council Districts, as well as targeted non-capital overhauls to comfort stations, long a source of frustration for New Yorkers, NYC Parks staff, and elected officials alike. Full details of our campaign platform are attached to our written testimony today.

We also want to note that as an agency, NYC Parks last fiscal year received slightly more than 0.6% of the entire City expense budget. In the PEG savings that have been announced in recent weeks, which total over

\$2.1B, NYC Parks has been asked to bear \$61.3M so far, which represents nearly 3% of the entire PEG for the City. While we understand that every agency needs to do its part, we are deeply concerned that NYC Parks is being asked to bear a disproportionate amount of savings relative to other agencies, when they are still being asked to remain open and be clean and safe for public use during this crisis. We ask our decision-makers to keep this in mind, as our parks are providing a level of essential service today that is proving crucial for the well-being and public health of all New Yorkers.

We know the Council is keenly aware of how integral parks are to our city as a part of our public realm. Fourteen percent of the land in this city is parkland, and now more than ever, our public open spaces have become recognized as a vitally needed resource for communities citywide as we live through this devastating public health crisis. Your leadership in calling for the City to open streets to pedestrian access will help to safeguard New Yorkers, giving them more options than our traditional parks and open spaces - allowing streets to act as a release valve for play and recreation, as well as providing alternative mobility options for our essential workers.

We recognize this is a challenging time for New York City and its budget process; this crisis, however, has also highlighted the essential role that parks play for our city. Parks have often been made to bear the brunt of past budget crises in this city, rendering our unique and incredible parks system overburdened and understaffed. This is a moment to learn from our City's past budget decisions, and ensure that parks, gardens, and open spaces receive the level of funding they need to best serve New Yorkers.

In a city that champions equity, we have to start treating our parks, gardens and open space as critical city infrastructure, which also means investing in the infrastructure of the thousands of people who care for them day-in and day-out. We ask that the Council continue to join us in advocating for this \$47M investment, and we urge the Mayor's office to make this meaningful and vitally needed addition to the Adopted FY21 expense budget for NYC Parks. Thank you for inviting me to speak today. We look forward to working with the City to create the best budget achievable for parks to benefit all New Yorkers. I'm happy to answer any questions the Council might 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. www.ny4p.org



Year 2/FY21 Budget Platform
\$47M to invest in the Expense Budget for NYC Parks

\$21.95M to invest in critical Maintenance and Operations

\$10M to baseline the 100 City Park Worker and 50 Gardener staff lines added by the Council in the FY20 budget.

\$5.5M to create a pathway to full-time employment for 100 Parks Opportunity Program participants citywide.

\$3M to create an in-house comfort station improvement team to target a comfort station in every borough, with 18 full-time staff, and 20 seasonal positions.

\$2.5M to bring critically needed maintenance equipment to all 51 Council Districts, including new mowers, Gators, and other equipment needed to ensure NYC Parks maintenance crews have the tools they need.

\$950K to more than double the NYC Parks staff conducting the critically-needed citywide Capital Needs Assessment, decreasing the timeline on finishing this work to understand where improvements are most needed in our parks system.

\$7.85M to invest in Recreation and Programming

\$4M in the budget would mean that 395 playgrounds would be able to host structured sports and afterschool programs for children in every district. This means structure, safety, and imaginative play for tens of thousands of New York's children and their families.

\$1.75M to hire additional staff for after-school programs at Recreation Centers citywide, which would complement the Administration's goal of extending Recreation Center hours.

\$1.8M to create a Natural Turf Management citywide crew to better maintain and care for our natural turf fields in every borough.

\$300K to hire five new Partnerships for Parks Volunteer Program Associates to support park stewards and volunteers across the city.

\$9M to invest in Parks Safety

\$3M to baseline and preserve the 50 Urban Park Ranger positions created by the Council in the FY20 budget.

\$6M to baseline and preserve the 80 Parks Enforcement Patrol positions created by the Council in the FY20 budget.

\$7.92M to invest in Nature and Resiliency

\$3.4M to baseline 15 GreenThumb staff added in FY20, and expand access to resources and tools for community gardeners citywide.

\$4M to baseline 47 Natural Resources Group staff created in the FY20 budget to continue conserving and caring for our natural forests.

\$520K to hire four full-time crews to conduct targeted lake and pond maintenance and monitoring in parks citywide.