



**New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
Oversight Hearing on the Process for Events Permitting at Parks in the Shadow of COVID-
19
June 23, 2021
Jessica Saab, Advocacy and Communications Project Manager**

Good afternoon. My name is Jessica Saab, and I am the Advocacy and Communications Project Manager of New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). We want to thank the City Council for its strong commitment to restoring essential parks workers positions in the preliminary budget response this year and thank Chair Koo for hosting this hearing and inviting us to speak. The Council's commitment to supporting the badly needed staffing levels for CPWs, PEP officers, and Urban Park Rangers is essential to helping our park system rebound.

Over the last year, our city's parks became the safest, and at some points, the only places to gather in community. NYC communities have a rich history of volunteering in their parks and, this year, that was stronger than ever. We work with grassroots volunteer groups every day who take care of their parks in different ways, from cleaning them, to planting them, to programming them. However, during a season with devastating budget cuts, it remained difficult and unnecessarily complicated for volunteer groups to do their work. Principal among the issues is that of indemnification. The city indemnifies many of the groups that volunteer through the 'It's My Park' program but does not indemnify many other grassroots organizations that care for parks citywide. This forces groups to get their own insurance, a burden too large and expensive, causing many of these groups to give up – the exact opposite of what NYC needs right now. In addition, there is often confusion due to each borough having a different permitting process. This should all be streamlined, made easier for the citizens that are volunteering their time, especially now as parks have played such a significant role in our lives.

I also want to take this opportunity to talk about two related budget items we hope the Council will restore. We urge leaders to restore \$4M to the Parks Equity Initiative, which gives funds directly to over 600 small volunteer groups and is a critical lifeline for many small parks throughout the city with dedicated volunteers hoping to make essential improvements. \$8M must also be restored to maintain our city's natural areas and wetlands, as well as adequately fund GreenThumb and our city's community gardens.

The NYC Parks Department is always asked to do more with less. It is urgent to restore the full budget to ensure parks are safe, clean, and accessible to all New Yorkers, whether part of a small volunteer groups hoping to put on events for their communities or every day New Yorkers who are just enjoying being outdoors. Thank you.

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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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