



**New York City Council Committees on Cultural Affairs and Economic Development
Int. 2068-2020: Open Culture Program
September 24, 2020
Adam Ganser, Executive Director**

Good morning. My name is Adam Ganser. I am the Executive Director at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify at this hearing.

This summer parks have been in demand like never before. At New Yorkers for Parks, the only independent advocacy organization in New York City, we are playing close attention to the demands on our city's open spaces. We advocate for the tools and resources that allow stewards of these public spaces to keep them clean, safe, and welcoming for all New Yorkers. We am thrilled to see New Yorkers coming together – for community, recreation, education, and yes, for culture and art – in our parks and open spaces.

At the same time, we need to be mindful that the demand not outstrip the ability of park stewards to care for public spaces with the resources that are available. Volunteers can't band together to pick up litter and care for plants the way they normally do each year. The nonprofits and conservancies that organize volunteers and pay for maintenance and repairs are suffering because their ability to fundraise and pay for extra labor has been cut out from under them. NYC Parks, the agency that oversees 14% of the city's land, got handed a budget cut of 14% in June – just as demand soared towards a summer peak. That's one of the largest cuts to any agency in the city, \$84 million. And we hear about additional layoffs on the table for this fall that might cut down parks labor again, making parks maintenance even more difficult.

Currently, these cuts mean hundreds fewer full-time staff, and over 1,700 fewer seasonal staff to do day-to-day maintenance in parks in all five boroughs. And that's with the combined voices of over 300 groups that joined together as the Play Fair Coalition to fight to keep park funding stable. Imagine what our parks would look like without those advocates. Imagine what our parks would look like if parks become even busier with even less support.

I would like to draw your attention to this imbalance between the many jobs that we are asking parks to perform and the park maintenance jobs that have been removed. If the Council provides a pathway for cultural organizations to use our public parkland and our public realm, we must ensure that the stewards of the public realm are not overlooked. Expanding park usage cannot be an unfunded mandate. We must find a way to lessen the maintenance burden of these additional uses, or identify funding to bolster NYC Parks' labor force.

The critical role our parks and open spaces play in the daily lives of New Yorkers has become more evident than ever during these unprecedented times and yet we continue to treat parks as if they are not essential city infrastructure. NY4P encourages the use of parks by any and all institutions but we ask the council to balance these allowance by ensuring open spaces are well maintained for all.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. I'm happy to answer any questions the Council might have.

###

*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*