



**New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation  
Oversight: Improving the Equity of Green Space throughout the City in Light of the  
COVID Epidemic  
October 22, 2020  
Adam Ganser, Executive Director**

My name is Adam Ganser and I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). We are New York City's only independent parks and open space advocacy and research organization, and we co-founded the Play Fair Coalition. Thank you for inviting me to speak today.

This administration has prioritized parks equity with many lasting accomplishments. The COVID crisis, however, has revealed significant structural inequities in our parks system, both in access and funding, that require a new emphasis in the immediate and long term.

Our parks system relies on hundreds of small parks to provide open space for the majority of New Yorkers. As a result, parks that serve the majority of low-income households are less than half as big as the parks serving high-income households. And these small parks are wholly reliant on public funds.

These smaller parks have been more susceptible to closures during the pandemic, with catastrophic results. According to data from The Trust for Public Land, more than 1 million New Yorkers in central Brooklyn, Queens and the East Bronx lost access to their park or playground this year.

The COVID-related economic crisis has also had an inequitable impact on New Yorkers and their parks. Despite record use during the pandemic, the parks department budget was cut by 14%, second highest among all agencies. Those cuts have led to drastic reductions of staff and maintenance. Not surprisingly, the areas most impacted by the closures and staff reductions are the same areas where the largest numbers of New Yorkers have died or become seriously ill with COVID, and are primarily communities of color.

As we look to an increase in COVID cases this fall, the City must aggressively plan to ensure all New Yorkers have access to open space.

**Immediate Priorities:**

- Identify funding to ensure a full seasonal parks staff;
- Unfreeze capital funds for critical improvements to our parks;
- Eliminate onerous legal requirements that make it nearly impossible for not-for-profit parks partners to support their open spaces.

Further we must not lose sight of the opportunity to adopt system change ideas that address the historic challenges of our parks system:

- Identify a more resilient and equitable public funding model for our parks system;
- Prioritize creative new park development in the outer boroughs as part of an equitable economic recovery.

For both, I would respectfully point the Council to a [report](#) New Yorkers for Parks co-authored with the New York Building Congress and an [Op-Ed](#) I co-wrote with Carter Strickland from the Trust for Public Land.

This is a critical moment for our parks system with significant opportunities to make lasting change for a better New York

Thank you.

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