



**New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
Oversight - Tree Removal and the Restoration of Power
in the Aftermath of Tropical Storm Isaias
September 14, 2020**

Good afternoon. My name is Lucy Robson. I am the Director of Research & Policy at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify at this hearing.

NY4P is a founding member of the Play Fair Coalition, which includes almost 300 organizations citywide, and has the support of a supermajority of the City Council. The Play Fair Coalition worked tirelessly over the past two years to get more money in the parks department budget and now, to prevent cuts to NYC Parks staffing.

NY4P recognizes that our city is in unprecedented times: Tropical Storm Isaias is just one of the example of how New York City is combating climate change during a global pandemic. During normal times NYC Parks relies on foresters, pruners, climbers, and stewardship volunteers to plant and maintain trees along our streets, sidewalks, and inside our parks and open spaces. In previous years' budgets these positions have been supported and funded. It's important to note that investing in these positions helps the City do preventative maintenance on trees throughout the five boroughs, and it's clear that damage from the storm would be worse if the administration hadn't funded forestry positions and services in previous years. But forestry positions were cut in the FY 2021 budget, and it's possible that forestry workers will be on the chopping block as the City considers making further cuts to public employees.

Though often overlooked, New York City's trees play a critical role in our urban infrastructure and livability – just like our roads and bridges. The benefits of trees, from reducing storm water runoff to fighting asthma to lowering ambient temperatures, are well-documented. Trees provide shade on hot summer days and help combat the urban heat island effect. They help us to conserve energy and mitigate our carbon emissions. They provide beauty and greenery on busy streets, serve as habitats to the city's wildlife, and clean the air New Yorkers breathe. NYC Parks has also calculated the monetary value of the services that trees along our streets and sidewalks provide, estimating that these trees provide over \$100 million each year in benefits to New York City and New Yorkers.

Trees are one of NYC's most important and valuable assets. It's up to the City not only to provide adequate funding to care for them, but to continue to plant more of them with a plan in place to care for those new trees, too. Like other infrastructure, trees need maintenance so they can provide positive benefits with risk-making elements removed. An example of tree maintenance is pruning, which ensures

the tree's overall health and provides an opportunity to remove weakened, dead, or decaying branches: the parts of trees that provide the greatest risk to life and property. Even as the City has funded tree maintenance robustly, it's common for volunteers to step into performing tree maintenance and pruning as well, especially for young, vulnerable trees. It's telling that our tree infrastructure system relies on volunteers for needed maintenance even at its highest-funded levels. Continued cuts to Parks staff will only exacerbate issues in tree maintenance, which create unsafe conditions for ourselves, our neighbors, our homes, our neighborhoods, and our parks.

I want to conclude by stating that trees are as important to our city and the people who live in it as our parks and open spaces. Trees can make a difference between a comfortable, shaded bench and a deserted, baking hot plaza. Their significance should not be overlooked and in fact their care and maintenance should be prioritized. We look forward to continuing to work with the Council to fight for the funding and structural changes that will be needed to ensure. Thank you for inviting me to speak today. 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.
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