



New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
Oversight – Overview of the Parks Department Concessions Process
January 27, 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). I want to thank the Committee on Parks and Recreation for inviting us to testify at today's hearing.

By and large, concessions located in our public spaces provide opportunities for park-goers to have a well-rounded experience in our City's open spaces. One of NY4P's paramount concerns around parks and open space is that they be accessible to the largest number and broadest cross-section of New Yorkers possible. For many New Yorkers and their families, having access to the services and amenities offered by the various concessions in our parks network can mean a full and comfortable day spent at a City park. We think it's also worth noting that for many residents of NYC, our parks provide their only logistically viable experiences with nature and the outdoors, and having the ability to purchase food or engage in unique programming offered via a Parks concession can help ensure that our parks are welcoming and accessible to a wide variety of New Yorkers.

Additionally, concessionaires with NYC Parks often provide added value to the parks system by executing facility upgrades or improvement, which would likely be out of reach for the agency to complete itself. The ability of an outside vendor to provide this level of targeted improvement within our parks is a benefit in that such outside parties are generally able to complete improvement projects more quickly and cheaply than if the project came through City dollars and process.

NY4P believes that the City should consider some improvements or changes to the Parks concession structure. In the Mayor's Message for the FY 2020 Executive Budget, the Administration shared an annual revenue forecast of \$74.5M from all revenue generated by recreational permits, marina rental fees, and concessions operated on Parks property. Notably, the projections for revenues from these sources in the Preliminary FY21 budget is comparable to this amount – year after year, this is not an insignificant amount of funding. As currently laid out by the City Charter, all of these revenues are directed into the City's general fund. In light of consistently insufficient funding for NYC Parks in both the City's Capital and Expense budget, we believe that even a partial restricting of the revenue stream from concessions for Parks operating and maintenance costs could provide a consistent source of funding to help improve conditions in parks citywide. In 2015, we advocated in a position paper done in partnership with the New York League of Conservation Voters Education Fund that 20% of the revenues generated by concessions on park properties be directed to a Park Equity Fund available for use citywide. We continue to believe that the City should contemplate some mechanism to allow some of the tremendous value generated by park concessions to go

back into the park improvements that are much-needed, and that currently lack consistent and predictable funding. We also want to underscore that in the event we could divert some portion of the revenues generated by our parks concessions, we strongly believe this funding should be additive to the current funding picture for parks, and not act as a substitute for current City funding.

Further, we believe the NYC Parks website could be improved to better share the locations of Parks concessions. The current list on the NYC Parks website does not seem to accurately reflect the location of many concessions that are currently in operation in parks citywide – this list and interactive map should be updated to better show the various concessions that exist in our parks. We also believe that an equitable distribution of concessions should be a continuing consideration as the City creates new opportunities and RFPs for concessionaires. There are many parts of the City’s parks system that lack the kinds of concessions enjoyed by park-goers in Manhattan, and we believe the distribution of these kinds of services should be better spread throughout the five boroughs, and should also strive for affordability of goods or services to the extent possible.

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*