



New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
Hearing on Int. 0407-2-14 & Int. 1340-2016, Relating to Capital Projects Implemented by
NYC Parks
January 19, 2017
Lynn Kelly, Executive Director

Good afternoon, my name is Lynn Kelly, and I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks. I want to thank the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation for inviting us to speak on this important issue today. As the citywide, independent advocate for parks and open spaces throughout New York City, the process of capital improvements in parks has long been of great interest to us.

It is clear that the two pieces of legislation up for consideration today reflect a deep frustration with the process of capital improvements – a frustration we believe is shared by everyday New Yorkers, members of the City Council, and the agency itself. In 2014, New Yorkers for Parks and Public Works Partners undertook a detailed survey of the process of capital projects management as it related to not just the Parks Department, but other city agencies that complete capital construction projects. Our findings showed that other city agencies were often able to execute capital projects more quickly, nimbly, and under-budget than Parks. These findings shaped a set of recommendations to NYC Parks that we are proud to say have had real impacts on how the agency manages this process. It is worth noting that the nature of parks make them inherently more challenging to improve – there are simply more stakeholders, more varied kinds of construction projects, and a procurement system beyond the agency’s control that result in some of the frustrations we’ve heard expressed today.

We want to commend NYC Parks on the changes it has implemented regarding the capital process. Many of these changes have made the process more transparent to the public, such as the development of the Parks Capital Tracker tool. This tool provides an invaluable service to the public in terms of understanding the process of how parks get built; what phase a specific project is in at any given time; and when folks can expect to see their park projects completed. We would encourage NYC Parks to make this tool more readily

available to the public through the home page of the NYC Parks website, as it is not currently apparent where to find this tool within the site. Recent Mayoral and Council funding commitments to the capital division at Parks have also allowed the agency to build the ranks of staff, which has also resulted in a more streamlined capital process. It is our understanding that Parks has made strides in fostering a greater sense of staff accountability and empowerment within the capital division, while also minimizing the implementation of change orders.

Regarding today's legislation specifically, we recognize the need for more clarity about where things stand in the capital process, especially in light of the significant funding commitments made by Councilmembers citywide to improve parks in their districts. We do have some concerns that both pieces of legislation may have the unintended effect of slowing down the overall process by adding another layer of required reporting, without funding to provide additional staff to take on these tasks. We would encourage the Council to examine ways it can help push for more robust cross-agency collaboration in the capital process, which we feel would go a long way toward minimizing the length of time it takes for a capital project to be completed. One recommendation would be to encourage the city to consider how it can best facilitate relationships with the common pool of design and construction firms that work across capital agencies. As it stands now, each agency has its own internal process and approach to creating bids and managing its vendors, many of which are shared across agencies, rather than sharing systems or leveraging each other's experience. More effective cross-agency collaboration at this level would have the effect of addressing some of the concerns brought forth in today's legislation.

New Yorkers for Parks looks forward to working with both the Council and NYC Parks on continuing to reform the system of capital projects. Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I welcome any questions you 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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