



**New York City Council Committees on Governmental Operations, Land Use, and
Subcommittee on Capital Budget
Requiring a Comprehensive Long-Term Plan
Intro. 2186-2020
February 23, 2021
Emily Walker, Director of Outreach and Programs**

Good morning. My name is Emily Walker, and I am the Director of Outreach and Programs at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). I want to thank the Committees on Governmental Operations, Land Use, and the Subcommittee on Capital Budget for hosting today's hearing.

NY4P is testifying today in support of Intro. 2186, which would require a comprehensive long-term planning process for the city every ten years, and would create quantitative targets to improve our public realm. For too long, planning has been completed in the City on a piecemeal basis, and without true interagency coordination, resulting in systemic inequities throughout the five boroughs. While many planning decisions of the past cannot be entirely erased, a thoughtful approach to comprehensive, cross-agency planning would help ensure that future investments are made that can address these long-standing inequities.

In terms of open space and parks, the City has for too long relied on discretionary allocations from Council Members and other elected officials. NYC Parks is the steward of 14% of the City's land, and yet receives only around 0.5% of the City's operating budget to maintain and operate it. The agency receives a slightly higher proportion of the City's overall capital budget, however NYC Parks does not have its own discretionary capital budget, making it almost wholly reliant on Council allocations for park infrastructure improvements. We've long believed that this system needlessly politicizes the process for park improvements, while also overlooking critical infrastructure improvements that are needed, but that lack public support. Additionally, this uneven level of capital investment citywide has had the unfortunate impact of making park improvements a driver of displacement. Park improvements should be the standard citywide, not the exception, and we are encouraged that this legislation will help provide a better roadmap for park infrastructure investments and, vitally, the ongoing maintenance costs that accompany them, while also specifically enacting a displacement risk index to help counter these impacts.

We are also pleased to see that a Needs Assessment of infrastructure assets would be required by this legislation. NYC Parks has begun a Needs Assessment process, but the funding needed to

complete this process has not been provided for this work to be done with any expediency. A legislative mandate for this work would have a powerful impact on moving this essential process forward.

We look forward to weighing in on this legislative process as it progresses. For many years, NY4P has produced data for everyday New Yorkers to better understand how their communities are (or are not) being served by public space and City investments. Unfortunately, the Covid crisis has laid bare the fact that many communities lack access to the open space amenities needed to make their neighborhoods livable, and the current fiscal crisis has dealt a blow to the already thin staff ranks at NYC Parks. Intro. 2186 represents a starting point in helping the City to be more proactive and equitable in its planning and distribution of resources, and it could not come at a more critical time.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today.

###

*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*