



**New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
Testimony on An Examination of the City's Parks without Borders
Initiative
December 3, 2015
Tupper Thomas, Executive Director**

Good morning. I am Tupper Thomas, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks. I want to thank the Committee on Parks and Recreation for inviting me to speak today.

NY4P supports the Parks without Borders initiative. The value of a park to the surrounding community is greatly reduced if community members are unable to easily access a park, and proximity does not necessarily mean accessibility. The city will now measure accessibility using the same metric we have long endorsed: residents should be within a one-quarter mile sidewalk route to a park entrance, not just the park itself. By creating new entrances, the city will encourage usership and make the park more inviting and safer.

We also applaud the inclusion of \$10 million for parks projects currently in the capital pipeline that need more funding, and are good candidates for edge redesign. Many parks projects fall short of achieving all necessary improvements because of a lack of funding. We hope Parks without Borders will continue for a number of years, giving the Parks Commissioner flexibility to address the needs of parks in all neighborhoods.

We were so pleased with the Community Parks Initiative because it was the first time that the Parks Department chose specific parks in low-income neighborhoods, based on targeted and tangible criteria. We hope that the public input process for Parks without Borders will generate great ideas, but without excluding those communities with less ability to organize and advocate for their parks. Permanent funding of increased staff for Partnerships for Parks would help the formation of friends groups, and provide training that will improve the ability of new groups to apply to this program.

We expect that the Parks without Borders Initiative will bring much-needed improvements to existing parks. However, once these parks are fixed we have to make sure that they receive funding for long-term maintenance.

Not to sound like a broken record, but the administration must add additional full time staff to the NYC Parks budget. The Council has been a champion for this cause but can only fund annual additions, not permanent staff. In order for capital programs like Parks without Borders to have a true impact there must be more staff, without which we the risk of undoing the important work completed by the Parks Department.

Thank you.