



**New York City Council Parks & Recreation Committee
Oversight Hearing on Tree Maintenance
February 25, 2014**

Good afternoon Chair Levine and members of the Parks Committee. I'm Tupper Thomas, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks, an independent research and advocacy organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods. Thank you for holding this hearing on a topic that truly affects New Yorkers in every neighborhood. It's great to see all of you on my first day at New Yorkers for Parks!

I'm pleased to report that the outlook for tree care is much rosier than when NY4P last testified on this topic in December of 2011. At the time, the tree care situation had grown dire: DPR's pruning and stump removal budget had fallen from \$7.4 million in 2008 to just \$1.7 million. As a consequence, the City's regular pruning cycle fell from every seven years – an appropriate duration – to once every 15 to 20 years. Those decreases led directly to a drop in pruning: according to Mayor's Management Reports, the City pruned 189,000 trees between 2007 and 2009, during which it spent roughly \$15 million on pruning, and just 90,000 from 2010-2012, when it spent roughly \$5 million.

Fortunately, thanks in part to a New Yorkers for Parks advocacy campaign, \$2 million was added to that budget for FY13 and that amount was baselined in the budget for FY14. Combined with \$2 million added for stump removal for FY14, DPR's tree care budget now exceeds \$5 million, and the pruning cycle has been reduced to every eight or nine years. The Parks Department has also added 50 new positions for tree care. We commend Mayor de Blasio for keeping those numbers steady in his FY15 preliminary budget.

Now is the time to build on this momentum and increase the baseline budget for tree care further by baselining an additional \$2 million in the budget so the Department can return to the preferred seven-year pruning cycle. This is particularly important as our city is increasingly battered by volatile weather – a trend that is sure to continue. Acknowledging our changing climate means making budgetary adjustments, and New York City's tree-care budget should ensure that inspections can occur quickly, and frequently, following storms that loosen limbs and branches.

Of course, it's next-to-impossible to eliminate accidents caused by falling branches altogether in a city of 5.2 million trees. But budget increases that expand professional inspections and prunings are the best remedy for mitigating such accidents. At the same time, the Parks Department should continue to broaden its Stewardship Corps network, even as nonprofit partners such as Trees New York and the New York Restoration Project do great work in growing the legion of citizen pruners.

Though often overlooked, New York City's trees – from tree pit ginkos to woodland pathway oaks – 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. 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.

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