

Study Criticizes Parks Dept. Management

By [TIMOTHY WILLIAMS](#)

Published: June 27, 2007

The quality of the typical New York City park is determined largely by whether it is in a wealthy or poor neighborhood, according to a study to be released by a private nonprofit group today. The report also indicated that despite budget increases in recent years, the Parks Department is not doing enough strategic planning to manage its parkland properly.

“About one of eight parks citywide is not in acceptable condition, and there is a significant correlation between a community district’s share of parks in unacceptable condition and its average income level,” according to the report by the group, the [Citizens Budget Commission](#).

The study, called “Making the Most of Our Parks,” is the latest analysis to suggest that city parks have devolved into a multitiered system, with parks operated by nonprofit groups like the [Central Park Conservancy](#) and the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation at the top, and parks that are in poor neighborhoods and are run by the Parks Department at the bottom.

“The challenge facing our city in the next century will be to create a park system that can take the successes of parks like Central, Prospect and Bryant and match their managerial prowess with additional public resources to provide a quality park for every neighborhood in New York City,” the report said.

The Parks Department did not disagree with the group’s main findings yesterday. In a statement, Warner Johnston, the department’s spokesman, said the agency’s performance had been steadily improving.

“As documented in the C.B.C. report, park conditions have improved dramatically across the board, with the greatest improvement in parks in poorer neighborhoods,” Mr. Johnston said. “We agree that more can be done to develop more sophisticated analytical tools for measuring park use and worker efficiency.”

The report found that while the Bloomberg administration has increased financing for parks over the past several years, the Parks Department has failed to collect data regarding how many people use its parks and for what activities, at what times particular parks are most crowded, and how much money is required to maintain specific parks.

The information the Parks Department uses to determine which parks need additional resources, some of which comes from periodic park inspections, is “inadequate for effective management,” the report said.

In contrast, the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation, which runs Bryant Park, keeps data on everything from the number of people who sit on the park’s benches at a certain time of day to the ratio of women to men who use the park.

That information is then used to make decisions about what new programs to offer.

Among the report’s recommendations is for the city to allow the Parks Department to keep a larger share of revenue from concessions generated in city parks. Currently, only Central Park, Bryant Park and a few others are entitled to keep some or all of the funds raised from activities like food sales or field rentals.

The report said creating a new fund from concessions revenue could be used to pay for park improvements and to reduce the cycle of borrowing that has been used to pay for large-scale park overhauls instead of daily maintenance.