

2009 CANDIDATE SURVEY

What do you believe are the top priority park issues that need to be addressed in your district and citywide?

Securing Adequate Funding / Maintenance for Parks

- a. Will you work towards securing long term funding for Parks?

Yes No

- i. *If so, would you consider exploring creative financial models such as Parks Improvement Districts (based on the BID model), tax increment financing (TIF), zoning benefits and public private partnerships to supplement maintenance and operating costs?*

Yes. In fact, I have proposed my own funding plan for parks in order to protect them from budget swings and careless cuts. (please see attached op-ed)

- b. Would you support dedicating revenue earned through park concessions to parks maintenance and operations?

Yes No

- i. *If so, would you also support revising the Major Concessions Rules to include all significant private uses on public property (including parks) to community/borough review?*

Yes No

- c. Will you support establishing the tracking of spending and staffing on a park by park basis?

Yes No

- d. When a capital project is not fully funded will you support diversifying funding sources to ensure their completion? What would those sources be?

Yes No

I support using both concessions and private funding for parks. I would not, however, support some types of corporate sponsorship or any business in a park not approved by the community.

- e. What specific actions would you take to ensure that every park in every neighborhood has properly working facilities such as ball-fields, educational facilities, restrooms, etc?

Facilitating immediate response to community concerns about parks is an important responsibility of any Council Member, and the most effective way of ensuring local parks are in good order. But the only way to guarantee continual maintenance of parks is to better fund them through a stream of revenue coming directly from City property taxes.

- i. *Will you support a "fix it first" policy for funding capital projects, so that resources are allocated to existing projects in need of repair?*

Yes No

f. Will you support adequate staffing and funding to ensure that new and existing parks stay in a “state of good repair”?

Yes No

i. *What funding/programs would you use to increase the full-time parks maintenance staff?*

Having a full-time maintenance staff at all parks should be the responsibility of the Parks Department. But, if they fail in that responsibility, it is ideal to have conservancies such as the ones at Prospect Park and in North Brooklyn that can raise private funds and augment funding for staff while creating an outlet for civic engagement.

ii. *What can be done to improve the baseline services, or maintenance of effort, in our parks to ensure that partnerships don't need to replace poor, existing services or neglected services such as bench and fountain repairs?*

Again: it should be the fundamental responsibility of the Parks Department to ensure a high level of service and maintenance at all our parks, including adequate staff, necessary equipment, and high standards for upkeep.

iii. *How would you fund the unique maintenance costs of waterfront parks (e.g. access, bulkheads, and piers)?*

Unfortunately, the current penalties for private developers neglecting the maintenance of bulkheads and piers, and for violation of local and federal environmental laws, are much, much too low. I would raise the penalties significantly (up to 10 times the current rate) and put a chunk of that money into maintenance of nearby parks. Another problem is that, even when landowners who break the law are harshly penalized, many of those fines are never paid. As chair of Community Board 1's Environment Committee, I have proposed requiring the developers of any new projects on the waterfront to post a bond before construction, which could be drawn down upon automatically by the City so that violators can't dodge penalties. Much of that revenue could also go directly to nearby parks.

Finally, waterfront access must be assured in the zoning text—especially when areas are being re-zoned. For instance, I fought for a requirement in the Greenpoint-Williamsburg rezoning which today guarantees that the private developers on the waterfront will create access to, and turn over to the public, the waterfront open space their new developments create.

g. Will you support park ratings by borough and community board in addition to the citywide level in the Mayor's Management Report?

Yes No

(But the standards for those ratings must be well thought out.)

h. Will you support making the official Parks Department “property list” – that specifically delineates all 1,700 properties – available online?

Yes No

Protecting Parkland

a. Will you support more laws that require public notification and input when a park will be used for non-park purposes, to afford parks the protection they need from development or use by other agencies?

Yes No

i. *How would you require that professional sports organizations assist in maintaining and operating public parks near their facilities?*

b. Will you work to strengthen parkland alienation regulation by requiring Environmental Impact Statements before parkland alienation bill is filed by municipality?

Yes No

i. *How will you do this?*

By submitting and passing legislation to build an early EIS into the City land-use process.

c. Will you support mitigation for taking of parkland and ensure replacement of lost parkland for the community?

Yes No

i. *How will you do so?*

By submitting and passing legislation to require the City to do so based upon a simple formula: one square foot of parkland in the surrounding community board for every square foot taken.

d. How would you prevent “pay to play” situations from arising at public and amateur sports facilities?

As the first aide to the City Council’s first committee on reform, I helped draft proposals which later became laws which greatly limit the amount of money political contributors who do business with the City can give to individual candidates. The same standards should be applied to employees and owners of companies who may not be paid directly by the City, but benefit from its decisions on land use and public financing.

e. Will you support legislation that requires regular NYPD reports to the City Council on crime in parks (i.e. Intro. 470)?

Yes No

f. Will you work towards making parkland part of the city’s CompStat system?

Yes No*

***Need more information on the proposal to answer.**

Expanding Park Use

a. Will you work toward creating, with significant community involvement, a comprehensive citywide master plan for parks and open spaces that will guide the overall acquisition, restoration, improvement, and maintenance of parks, natural areas, playgrounds and athletic facilities in the five boroughs?

Yes No

i. What is your vision for some of the new parks?

I would like to create as much waterfront open space as possible by using designs that yield low operations costs—such as plans for passive recreation at the proposed new Bushwick Inlet Park. We also need to identify lots which could easily be turned into valuable open space. I have, for instance, found waterfront lots in Greenpoint-Williamsburg which are already designated parkland, but are poorly utilized as parking lots or staging areas for City agencies.

b. Will you support extending Resolution No. 1033 which calls for the continued protection of community gardens and the rights of the community and gardeners?

Yes No

c. What specific actions would you take to revitalize the recreational and amateur sports programs that have been decreased by this year's budget cuts?

d. What specific actions would you take to enable a much higher level of collaboration among the Parks Dept. and other city agencies on issues such as stormwater management, greenways, and economic development projects?

I would work to create an infrastructure czar who would straddle all related agencies to require them to collaborate on sanitation, environmental standards, open space, and development.

e. How will you ensure that public spaces created as amenities/mitigation for large scale economic development projects such as Atlantic Yards, Hudson Yards, and Manhattanville are truly open to the public?

By amending the zoning text, the City can require private developers to make specific accommodations for the public. There is also a general waterfront text amendment currently under consideration, which I support, that would create a better development standard for waterfront lots.

i. Do you support mapping such public spaces as parkland?

Yes No*

***Need more information.**

National and Regional Parks

a. How will you support the creation of planned new regional waterfront parks like Fresh Kills, Hudson River Park, Governors Island and Brooklyn Bridge Park?

It is our government's job to use our taxpayer money to provide us with open space where possible. As Council Member, I would use every tool at my disposal to ensure the City and State parks departments have the funding to do just that. But I would also use creative ideas such as my tax incremental financing program to make funding and maintaining parks more possible.

b. What are your plans to ensure that all citizens have equal access to these regional facilities?

It is the responsibility of our parks departments to ensure equal access to all—but I would also become personally involved in the development of parks such as Brooklyn Bridge Park, so that the design of the park is welcoming and not exclusionary.

Daily News Op-Ed: Create Park Improvement Districts

DAILY  NEWS

Funding for Parks Creates a Perpetual Cycle of Growth

By Evan Thies

The recent news that residential development in Brooklyn Bridge Park has stalled indefinitely is the latest sign that New York's economy is suffering a major downturn, and particularly bad news for the park itself, which was relying on that development to pay for operations cost. But the fact that we won't soon be seeing any new towers along that section of the Brooklyn waterfront need not jeopardize the park. Indeed, the economic crisis should help us realize that we should not rely on development in parks to fund them, and force us to find more stable ways to protect precious open space from financial crises and government cuts.

The truth is parks already fund themselves through the increases in tax revenue they create from the neighborhoods they are in. Unfortunately, the parks never benefit

directly. Any real estate agent will tell you that parks are a big help to property values, but a study conducted late last year by the Regional Plan Association finally gave us real numbers on exactly how much property tax revenue parks generate.

In the three years after construction was completed on the Greenwich Village section of Hudson River Park in Manhattan, the City received \$200 million in tax revenue from properties within two blocks that can be attributed to the park, and a whopping 20 percent more per unit than in adjacent neighborhoods farther away. The entire Greenwich Village section cost \$75 million to build. In other words, the addition of a park there has already paid for itself and much more.

Yet none of the new revenue created by the park goes directly to the park. In fact, Hudson River Park is being required to pay for its own operating costs through fundraising and development. Brooklyn Bridge Park's planned residential towers are another example of this paradigm, and actually take away valuable open space. With money for new private investment scarce, both parks are stuck without funding.

No money for operations costs means an inferior park or maybe no park at all. Either way, a vicious circle begins where property values do not increase as much as they could, tax revenue dips, and inevitable cuts in the parks department budget lead to further declines in service and revenue, and so on.

There is a better, fairer way to fund our parks—and it won't cost us a dime. The City and State should automatically set aside a portion of the revenue created by parks for parks, instead of plowing it straight into the City's coffers and leaving our open space vulnerable to budget cuts. The money could be used citywide to serve under-served communities, and to directly support the parks in neighborhoods with small tax bases, as well as areas with high property values. The City already assesses individual properties based on the value of other similar properties, so making comparisons to

learn what new value a park creates and what value is simply a result of regular market shifts should not be difficult.

When we invest in parks, people will invest more in our communities—the result will actually lead to even greater increases in revenue, reducing the taxpayers’ burden in the long run. Cities such as Seattle and Chicago have recognized this, and they already fund their parks through these “park improvement districts”.

We are running out of time to protect our parks. Parks Department funding was reduced by \$10 million this year, and is likely to decrease further in the year to come. The City shouldn’t get a pass on paying its fair share, and some commercial activity in parks can help defray costs while adding to the experience, but it’s time to recognize that relying on residential development is an unnecessary and unstable method of funding open space. If we don’t somehow build-in funding for parks, we won’t just be imperiling precious open space, but also risking proven revenue generators for the City at a time when we need all the revenue we can get.

Evan Thies is a former City Council staffer and community advocate in Brooklyn.