

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

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?

I believe strongly in the importance of creating an oasis of green, calm, safety and peace in the middle of our bustling, city environment. Parkland creates a sense of tranquility and respite that nothing else in our city can offer to our citizens. The only way we can continue to enjoy these precious urban commodities is to continue to make sure they receive the funding they need to stay clean, safe, and large. I would be open to considering the above financial models where they would benefit the long term sustainability of our parks and open spaces, and keeps Brooklyn as green as possible.

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

Yes

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

Creating sustainability in our park operations has to be a top priority for any parkland agenda. Dedicating the revenue generated from park concessions to maintenance and operations helps ensure long term fiscal stability and provides a guaranteed revenue stream for our parks. I would be open to reviewing aspects of the Major Concessions Rules that call for community and neighborhood review of significant private uses of public property, provided that we aren't subjecting individual citizens to undue burdens.

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

Yes

Absolutely. Each park in New York should be viewed not just as part of the system, but also as an individual entity serving a community. Tracking spending and staffing on a park-by-park basis ensures that no park or community falls through the cracks, and that serious problems and issues are dealt with quickly and efficiently.

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

I am open to a range of funding sources, though I am averse to placing private housing in public park facilities, and would oppose that type of funding mechanism.

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?

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

I will meet with parks and community groups to take stock of the park improvement needs in our district from one end of the district to the other to ensure that we create a fair and comprehensive plan to serve the district.

Establishing park by park tracking of spending is a great start to ensuring that sufficient funding finds its way to each park in our city. As an addendum to such an effort, we must track maintenance and facility repair needs for the assets we have. I would absolutely support a “fix it first” policy so that needy facilities are not left to idle in need of repair. Fixing our existing facilities is a relatively low cost way of improving our parks system that is far cheaper than creating entirely new facilities, and typically serving established but underserved neighborhoods.

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

Yes

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

I am open to a range of sources, including concessions, BIDs, and other means that have been demonstrated to be successful. I would also work with groups such as New York Cares and local parks groups to coordinate volunteer efforts, which provide community members with a an opportunity to pitch in and take ownership of park excellence.

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?

I will engage with parks and community groups to take ownership of park issues; there is nothing like a committed group of volunteers in a community, along with City help, to create a truly wonderful, well programmed space. Carroll Park is an excellent example of committed local residents and the City working together.

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

We need to recognize that our waterfront parks are part of a broader maritime scheme and city infrastructure; these are great opportunities to engage Federal and State resources in conjunction with City funds.

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

Yes

Absolutely. Local communities who make daily use of the parks are in the best position to give the clearest indication of their safety, cleanliness and functionality, and I would look to partner with boroughs and local community boards to ensure we are hearing and addressing the needs of local citizens.

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

Yes

The more transparency and information sharing we can achieve, the better.

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

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

Our professional sports teams are intricately woven into the fabric of our culture here in New York, and are a source of inspiration and imitation for our youngsters who play in the parks neighboring their facilities. I would partner with local sports teams to create a “good neighbor” program, where athletes and team representatives can help to educate the public on parks issues, call attention to needed upgrades or repairs, and take the time to meet with our citizens and their families making recreational use of the parks. Other programs, such as park clean-ups, cookouts, team rallies, autograph sessions, etc, can and should take place more often in nearby parks.

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

Yes

i. *How will you do this?*

I am a strong believer in protecting public facilities for public use, and not betraying the public trust by giving away those utilities to the highest bidder. I absolutely believe that before a municipal parkland is sold, leased, or otherwise given over to a non-profit entity, an Environmental Impact Statement, investigated the impact of the proposal on the surrounding environment and community is essential.

When I was at the Rutgers Environmental Law Clinic, we fought against the alienation of a beloved piece of parkland in Plainfield, NJ. We lost that battle because local politicians sided against parks preservationists. As councilman, I will fight to preserve parkland from similar encroachments - and this time, from a position of power.

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

Yes

i. *How will you do so?*

As noted in the previous question, I believe in using the power of the office a Councilmember to apply political pressure to the state to ensure that lost parkland is replaced within a community. There may be times when another vital public need requires a permanent or temporary repurposing of a piece of parkland, for example for a new mass transit facility. In that event, we need to minimize the impact on affected local residents by providing alternate facilities and/or upgraded facilities after a temporary repurposing.

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

We need to have an open and fair bidding process with clearly delineated rules. Those rules may vary from venue to venue based on the unique needs of the local community. But the process for selection must be completely transparent and open.

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

Yes

Parks should be a safe haven for our citizens, and policing our parks and keeping the Council abreast of the crime rates/safety of our parks should be a top priority. Information is power.

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

Yes

As I noted in the previous question, I believe people should feel safe in our parks, and I support any initiative that helps to track crime rates in our parks and makes it easier for the police to do their job in protecting people using our public utilities. Parks users also have a right to know about crime levels in our parks to make informed decisions, and all of us can formulate better policy when we have a complete picture of park statistics.

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

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

I am a supporter of the Brooklyn Greenway Initiative as a great asset for increasing our connectivity and mobility within Brooklyn and NYC more generally. I am a supporter of the planned new projects such as Fresh Kills in Staten Island, Brooklyn Bridge Park and the Governor's Island project. Beyond these projects, I believe we need a renewed focus on park accessibility by bike and mass transit. We also need targeted development of neighborhood playground and dog run amenities

ii. How would you develop it?

First, my office will partner with parks advocacy groups, the borough presidents, local park committees, community groups and community boards to ensure that the citizen voice is heard. I would then work through the Council, Mayors office and Parks department to create the plan, ensuring the establishment of regular channels of communication back to the local constituencies that use each park.

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

I have supported and will continue to support legislation calling for the protection of neighborhood open spaces and community gardens, as important sources of air quality, green space and rain absorption. I will work to protect and expand the rights of gardeners in our City.

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?

I am a strong advocate for recreational and amateur sports programs. Though I am only one vote in the Chamber, I believe a Councilman can use his or her pulpit to effectively apply pressure to the Council and the Mayor's office to reinstitute these and other important programs.

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?

The Parks Dept. cannot adequately care for our parkland if they cannot collaborate effectively with other city agencies. On specific projects in our borough and on citywide initiatives, my office will work to bring Parks officials together with DEP, DOT and EDC representatives, along with parks and community advocates.

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?

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

Yes

I believe these public spaces should be mapped as parkland, provided that doing so is not simply a fig leaf that *appears* to meet community need and prevents new park investment.

For the record, I am AGAINST the current formulations for, e.g., Atlantic Yards and the Hudson Yards proposals for a variety of reasons. One of those reasons is that I don't believe the "public" places in these plans are adequately public.

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?

I will be a vocal proponent in the Council for pushing ahead with planned new regional waterfront parks throughout the City. As I noted above, I am supporter of the Brooklyn Greenway Initiative, and believe that creating a greener New York is an imperative for this City.

I believe it is vital to fund these projects, as well as to tie these projects together with world class cycling, pedestrian and mass transit facilities - including rail, bus and watercraft.

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

Ensuring that all of our citizens can partake equally in the natural beauty and tranquility of our parks is a top priority for me. First and foremost, we need to ensure that we are providing adequate transit access to parkland, so that would be park goers are not discouraged from making the trip due to long wait times or crowded subways. Keeping our city moving fluidly to ensure access to its farthest reaches is a major theme of my campaign. Additionally, we need to be sure that people with physical disabilities are provided the amenities they need to enjoy parkland comfortably.

I will work tirelessly to propagate a truly comprehensive network of bike facilities and interconnected transit facilities.

c. What steps would you take to promote the use of and access to our city's national parks at Gateway National Recreation Area and the other National Parks of NY Harbor?

First, we must take the necessary steps to ensure that the National Parks of NY Harbor are accessible through improved mass transit and bike access.

Second, program for people. Environmental and maritime themed programming is an excellent use for these sites that would serve triple duty as education, service and recreation.

