

City

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Comptroller Candidate

2009 CANDIDATE SURVEY

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

As a Council Member, I have continually led the fight to prevent the over-development of New York City. If we are not careful, the interests of private developers can dominate our City's landscape. For example, I recently led the fight to hold the current Administration accountable for a promise they made several years ago to turn a blighted vacant commercial lot into a park on 65 Commercial Street in Greenpoint. Green spaces and parks are essential to the overall welfare of our city and I will continue this fight as Comptroller.

Additionally, we must think beyond the ground and consider ways to increase green spaces, parks and gardens on the rooftops of our city. I have been an active advocate of green rooftops and even recently led a panel discussion with Chicago's Mayor Daley on ways NYC can increase park and green space on this vastly under-utilized resource.

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?

In these times of economic uncertainty, we must consider ways to fund vital City programs through innovative ways. Parks provide such a rich range of benefits, that we should certainly be identifying ways to involve public private partnerships and Parks Improvement Districts to provide funding. Such improvement districts and public private partnerships have proven highly effective in other capacities and they should certainly be explored for use with our city's parks. Additionally, as Comptroller I will be in a unique position to assess ways that tax increment financing support can our park system as well. This is especially critical for our ability to redevelop blighted areas and transform them into green park space, while generating needed new revenue streams.

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

Yes No

As a City Council Member, I co-sponsored the bill (Intro 327) to ensure that all parks citywide would be able to receive revenues for concessions.

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

Yes, these private vendors are benefitting from a public space and their presence and operation should at the very least be reviewed by the community and borough the park is located in, especially as the local community boards and boroughs are more likely to understand the unique issues surrounding the park. I would also support revising the space requirements to take into

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account the ratio of space occupied by a vendor as opposed to merely a raw acreage. (For example, an 8,000 sq. ft vendor will have a much larger impact on a ½ acre park than on a park several acres big).

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

Yes No

A major component of my candidacy is increased transparency and accountability. This includes conducting fiduciary oversight at a more detailed level. In that respect, I support tracking spending and staffing on a park by park basis. Furthermore, beyond transparency, this promotes fiscal discipline by encouraging more efficient allocation of resources. By tracking these needs, we can better identify and re-direct support for the park staff and operations.

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

However, I think it is vital that we conduct prudent planning as projects are undertaken. Proper assessment and realistic goals (which I would certainly assist with as Comptroller) are essential to keeping capital projects under budget and on time. Once the total project funds are identified and approved, I would explore any and all ways to make sure the project is completed.

One of my main goals as Comptroller is to eliminate wasteful spending. I will stringently assess the spending in the City using tools at my disposal, and re-allocate these resources to programs and agencies that are in need and are using the funds wisely. A well run and fiscally sound park system should be rewarded with further capital.

Finally, we should always explore partnerships when appropriate. Working with the local business community (by providing access to waterways, for example) may be one way to increase funding for parks. As long as they are formed in a cooperative and transparent manner and balance all interests, such partnerships may support ongoing capital projects in need of funding.

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 No

This makes the most fiscal sense as we must spend cautiously by fixing and improving existing assets. This should come with a careful assessment strategy, however, to ensure that such improvements are not conducted without proper due diligence as a stop-gap measure when more comprehensive action is needed, or as a political appeasement, but are made out of genuine need for repair.

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

Yes No

As with the above question, it should be a primary goal to maintain existing assets. We must make a dedication to our parks and the staff by investing resources to keep them running

properly and in a state of good repair.

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

Job growth is a crucial area of need for our City and something I've continued to fight for. I would explore ways to work with other agencies and non-profit organizations to fund, train, and sustain a full-time parks maintenance staff. I have a vision to create a green city with good jobs and here is a great example to identify available funds (including federal stimulus funds) to do both.

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?

The City should institute a rigid baseline repair program to make sure that the minimum threshold state of repair is met – that is an investment that can utilize economies of scale for the whole city (benches, lampposts, sidewalk and landscape repairs that are used Citywide). By meeting this minimum threshold, additional capital can be used more innovatively to create unique park and public spaces...but only after the minimum maintenance has been provided for by the City.

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

The City must first prioritize investment in baseline maintenance for all parks to guarantee a minimum standard. Beyond that, as alluded to earlier, we should explore appropriate public and private partnerships, where local businesses can cooperate with the parks and surrounding community for amenities such as access to waterways. For example, perhaps a new water taxi service implemented through a public/private partnership will not only increase access, but provide a revenue stream for waterfront parks.

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

As mentioned before it is crucial to add a level of local oversight that includes the boroughs and community boards. This not only makes for more robust and in-depth analysis, but adds the local input and feedback that is vital for a resource – such as park – that has such a strong impact on the local community.

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

Yes No

As Comptroller, I would advocate for this as sound policy, and will also utilize the tools of my office to bring about accessibility and transparency (something efficiently accomplished through online initiatives and website portals).

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?

As a City, I believe we need to better negotiate with professional sports teams. While they add an important element to City life, it is important that we not offer too many concessions to pro sports teams at the expense of valuable City resources (ranging from tax revenue to park property and land). As Comptroller, I would carefully consider parks and neighborhoods that are affected by sport facilities and demand that team management offer financial support and cooperation for parks and public spaces that they share or affect with their presence. This should definitely be applied when the City considers financing new projects like stadiums (especially when expansive parking lots and space requirements are needed). Forward-thinking plans will integrate sport facilities with public green spaces as part of an inviting and inclusive overall recreation development zone that can be much more than just a sporting event destination.

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?

I have been a big proponent of Smart Development as a City Council Member and have recently put together a bill that will require City agencies to list the impact that major developments will have on their neighborhoods, including impacts to crucial services like firefighters and law enforcement. I would seek to expand this to include parkland as well. We need to protect the city from over-development and make sure that our green spaces and public parks are preserved.

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?

I would advocate that mitigation is included in Smart Development legislation such as what I mentioned above – with specific measures and timelines laid out for replacing lost parkland.

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

One of the main safeguards against this is an open and public process for such negotiations. Too often, this City's administration has conducted such agreements behind closed doors and through an opaque process. As Comptroller, I would make it a priority to make such major financial dealings transparent and hold the parties involved accountable for agreements made. As part of this, I would demand full disclosure (financial and campaign/political affiliations) for the parties involved, including attorneys, developers, consultants, investors, and City officials to ensure that there are no political improprieties and pay to play is eliminated from the realm of possibilities.

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

Yes No

This is an issue I certainly support – as a matter of fact, as a City Council Member on the public safety board, I co-sponsored this particular introduction and was pleased to see it pass both the committee and the City Council and eventually signed into law. I will continue to fight for such policy in every capacity available to me as Comptroller.

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

Yes No

Absolutely. Such integrated data-driven processes are key for efficient and comprehensive quality of life and safety issues. As Comptroller, I will be in a unique and influential position to advocate inclusion of parkland into the CompStat system.

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

As Comptroller I would continually assess the City's land resources, agencies and programs and ensure that we are using our park space properly and more importantly, are developing land into park space. I will identify collaborations and partnerships wherever possible, perhaps forming a Parks Advisory Council to advise such a plan that would include the parks department and relevant agencies, but also community boards, borough president offices, and of course, the many advocacy groups such as New Yorkers for Parks.

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

I would advocate for better, smarter, greener development along the waterfront. As former chair of the Waterfront Development Committee, this is certainly an area of policy I've explored in my career – successfully finding ways to better analyze this great New York City resource, which eventually led to a Waterfront Planning Advisory Board. As mentioned, I also see NYC's rooftops as a vastly under-utilized potential garden and park space.

ii. *How would you develop it?*

As Comptroller, I would carefully devise a plan that integrated local public input with the City's assessment of needs for parks. I can further facilitate the public private partnerships that may be created and identify ways to continue improving the collaboration between City and non-City agencies. I would also pursue the Green Rooftop strategy as a Citywide initiative—putting gardens and rooftop green spaces on appropriate buildings, starting with City buildings (including the New York City Housing Authority buildings), utilizing tools as Comptroller to assess need and identify potential roofs, and audit the implementation of such programs, advocating for policy where necessary.

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

Yes. The resolution is in committee right now, and I would certainly support it when it comes

to a Council vote.

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?

Unfortunately, it is a time when many programs and agencies are called upon to make sacrifices. However, we also need to preserve the programs that keep our youth (and adults!) active and safely invested in our communities. This leads to a more stable and productive workforce. So, if there are synergies with workforce development programs—including relevant federal stimulus funds—I would work with those administrators to explore ways to combined forces and find funding. Additionally, public private partnerships are a way not only to engage the local business community, but provide a revenue stream necessary to fund these 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?

As should be a recognizable theme, I would promote collaboration among City agencies to every extent possible as Comptroller. To begin with, I will carefully audit Citywide usage of these resources and identify strengths and weaknesses in their current operation and find out ways to work together. For example, there should be full transparency (which I would facilitate) for how City agencies affect storm drains, greenways, and develop projects. When this is properly communicated and planned, the City can better anticipate upcoming strains on the City's resources—especially as it affects the park system.

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?

Again, the theme is transparency. I have fought against the Atlantic Yards development for failure to provide this and would continue that fight to ensure that the public is aware of the specifications of such major projects, and more importantly, when the developers make agreements for public space they are held accountable for carrying out those plans. As Comptroller, I would implement a reward and punishment system for adhering to these agreements make sure that public spaces are truly public and accessible.

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

Yes No

And as Comptroller I would see that this mapping process was done efficiently and made available to the public – perhaps through online portals.

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?

As one of the city's top elected officials, I will weigh into these discussions as frequently as possible, using my influence to lobby for forward-thinking development of these spaces. Additionally, as Comptroller, I will make sure that any development plans for these spaces are carefully and realistically planned out—safeguarding any obstacles that the City would face which