

## New Yorkers for Parks Candidate Questionnaire

Bill Thompson, Candidate for Mayor

### 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), TIF, zoning benefits and public/private partnerships to supplement maintenance and operating costs?

*It is essential to identify innovative sources of revenue to fund parks in the long term. Not only do well-maintained parks provide a quiet haven from the bustle of City life and a place for active recreation, but as the New Yorkers for Parks report How Smart Parks Investment Pays Its Way clearly establishes, investing in parks spurs economic revitalization and increases property values and the tax base.*

*We must be careful, however, that supplemental revenue sources do not supplant existing City operating funds, that creating PIDs do not lead to rent increases for small businesses, and that facilities assisted with public/private partnerships include a full range of uses that are of interest to all the members of the surrounding communities.*

*I will also work to ensure that all neighborhoods throughout our City receive equitable, long-term funding and services for parks. I will look to potentially boost public, long-term financing to under-parked areas if it is determined that certain neighborhoods are receiving adequate funds through private sources.*

- 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 review?

Yes

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

Yes

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

Yes

What would those sources be?

*All potential federal and State funding streams must be tapped and private contributions should be sought from conservancies, foundations, "alliances" and "friends of" groups. In addition, inasmuch as the building of significant new parks facilities increases the value of adjacent properties, in some instances Tax Increment Financing revenue could be used to finance capital projects.*

- 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 and restrooms, etc.?

*Notwithstanding the City's current fiscal difficulties, we cannot allow facilities such as ballfields and restrooms to deteriorate. The City must work closely with neighborhood groups to identify and prioritize repair projects. This could be facilitated through a Department of Parks and Recreation online public complaint system. Giving the public access to the complaint system website not only to file complaints but to review complaints filed by others would help community groups and elected officials press the City to make repairs.*

- 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

- 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?

*Hopefully, as the City's economy comes out of recession and the fiscal crisis eases, it will be possible to augment full-time staff. In the meantime, the City should seek increased support from conservancies, parks "alliances," and public/private partnerships, with the proviso that the City maintains its current efforts. We must take care, however, that when relying on non-City funding sources, we do not focus entirely on parks in the more affluent communities while maintenance of parks in other communities continues to suffer.*

*We should also work to tap all possible federal funds, which might include stimulus funds and perhaps even funds for navigable waterways for work on bulkheads.*

- 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 water fountain repairs?

*It is critical that seemingly small repair projects be attended to as quickly as possible and that our City establish a minimum level of maintenance and adhere to it. The public online complaint system recommended above would help alert DPR to needed repairs and assist community groups and elected officials in pressing the Department to follow up.*

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

*As stated above, a minimum level of maintenance must be determined and the City must ultimately be responsible for ensuring that these facilities do not deteriorate. Private funding, including assistance through public/private partnerships, will need to play a significant role. When relying on private sources such as commercial development to fund maintenance, however, we must be sure that the amount and type of such development is appropriate and has wide community support.*

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

*Yes. Ideally, the ratings would be developed in consultation with outside groups and, if appropriate, prepared by them. In general, I support the accurate and increased use of City data to track spending, staffing, and other key measures for parks. Furthermore, I will consult with parks advocates and other users to develop more comprehensive park-by-park, community-by-community, borough-by-borough, and Citywide measures and a more comprehensive database. This will allow my administration, advocates, and the public to compare how we are doing in specific communities, gauge our performance overall, and track it over time.*

- h. Will you support making the official Parks Department "property list"—that specifically delineates all 1,700 properties—available on line?

Yes

### **Protecting Parkland**

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

Yes

*My strong commitment to ensuring public notification and input in decisions to use parks for non-parks purposes was demonstrated in my opposition to the City's plan to contract with a company to build a massive water park on Randall's Island. In a public statement I issued when I voted against this project at the City's Franchise and Concession Review Commission, I called the City's process to build the water park "flawed and opaque." When the City finally announced in September 2007 that it would terminate this contract, I issued*

*a statement calling for any development of Randall's Island to be done "through a transparent process and involve all stakeholders."*

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

*Agreements made with such organizations during the land review process for new facilities or as part of the negotiations for a public benefit should include penalties for violation.*

*My commitment to requiring professional sports organizations to meet their obligations was demonstrated in January 2009 when I was the sole vote on the NYC Industrial Development Authority against additional funding for the New York Yankees' new stadium. I stated that the City needs to get more in return from the Yankees before allowing them to issue additional debt. In a press release I stated, "Incredibly, the Yankees are asking for more money and the City is giving it to them without asking for anything in return."*

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

Yes

- i. How would you do this?

*It would require action by the State Legislature, which I would support.*

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

*I will, and I will be more cautious than previous administrations about supporting projects that take park land in the first place.*

How would you do so?

*I will work closely with the community on a case-by-case basis to ensure that the law is enforced and lost parkland is fully mitigated.*

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

*My record demonstrates that I will stand up against "pay to play" arrangements. I was a leader in the fight against the City's initial plan to give private schools exclusive access during prime after-school hours to 80 percent of the school athletic fields that would be developed on Randall's Island. I said that the plan failed to address the enormous need for recreational space for children of the communities nearest the island—East Harlem, Port Morris, and Astoria. My office worked to gain important changes, reflected in the new agreement this June that substantially expands public school access to the fields and provides resources for public school athletic programs and shuttle buses from 125<sup>th</sup> Street during after school hours, among other benefits.*

*In testimony regarding the use of the Randall’s Island athletic fields before the City Council Parks and In Recreation Committee in January 2007, I stated, “We cannot deny the children of our City this chance to participate in team sports and physical activity simply because they can neither afford the cost of a private academy nor access the physical space where such recreation takes place.” That standard should and must be the rule when it comes to the use of public and amateur sports facilities.*

*It is also crucial that the City fully enforce concessions agreements at public sports facilities such as Yankee Stadium. In 2008, I issued an audit that found that the New York Yankees had underpaid the City more than \$11 million in rent over a two-year period. We recovered that money for the City. As Mayor, I will be alert to the possibility of these kinds of underpayments.*

- 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 will work to ensure that agreements to provide such public spaces are legally enforceable by the City and negotiations are completely open and publicly documented.*

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

Yes

- g. Will you work towards making parkland part of the City’s Compstat system?

Yes.

### **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, playgrounds and athletic facilities in the five boroughs and athletic facilities in the five boroughs?

Yes

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

*Much attention has been paid in recent years to opening the waterfront to public access. While I support the expansion of waterside parks ,I also believe that more attention needs to be paid to providing park space in and for under-parked communities that might not be near a waterfront, including on currently vacant sites.*

*To serve a diverse population, including people of all ages, parks should ideally provide for a wide range of uses, including both passive and active recreation. They should keep up with new needs and interests, such as bicycling, skateboarding, and*

*cricket fields. Finally, we need to expand the number of playgrounds that are accessible for people in wheelchairs; currently, there is only one per borough.*

- ii. How would you develop it?

*Parks must be developed with the active participation of each affected community.*

*I will also convene a Task Force to examine and make recommendations as to how our City can better fund and service our under-parked communities. This Task Force—which will include advocates, Community Board members, and other stakeholders—will work with City Council members and other elected officials to ensure that all our parks receive the funding and services they deserve.*

- b. Will you support extending Resolution 1033, which calls for the continued protection of community gardens and the rights of community gardeners?

Yes

- 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 have spoken out about the lack of gyms and inadequate physical education programming in our public schools. I released a major study on income-based health disparities in New York City that highlighted the need for greater opportunities for physical exercise. I am fully committed to revitalizing recreational and amateur sports programs by tapping not only City resources, but stepping up efforts to obtain philanthropic contributions and corporate sponsorships.*

- 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 storm water management, greenways and economic development projects?

*I will assign a high-level staff member in the Office of the Mayor to keep close track of each agency's plans and projects and ensure coordination and collaboration. This individual will be assured sufficient staff to fully carry out these responsibilities.*

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

*I will seek to ensure that these agreements to create open public spaces are legally enforceable and that negotiations for the provision of such space are open and publicly documented. Transparency and accountability are essential.*

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

*Yes. Mapping as parkland will ensure that these spaces will continue to be used as parks.*

## 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?

*Public/private partnerships will be necessary. But, as stated above, we must remember that these are public parks first and foremost.*

*Given that new parks enhance nearby property values, we should explore whether to implement programs such as the proposed plan to support the new Brooklyn Bridge Park, which would provide funds from additional tax revenue generated by rezoning areas near the Park. This plan would require action by the State Legislature and should be pursued only if there is strong community support.*

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

*Good mass transit accessibility is key. This can include extending bus routes, providing shuttle buses, and access by ferry. These facilities must be fully accessible to the disabled. And they should be developed to address the needs and interests of a wide range of users from across the region.*

- 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 other National Parks of NY Harbor?

*Many New Yorkers are aware of the GNRA ocean beaches like Riis Park and Sandy Hook, but few know about other GNRA facilities, such as the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge. There should be a public information campaign to make New Yorkers aware of all GNRA facilities and programs and how to get to them.*

*On a related issue, the National Park Service has shortchanged capital investment and maintenance of the GNRA. Many of the facilities are dilapidated. The City must press Congress and the federal government to treat New York City NPR waterfront facilities in a fairer, more equitable manner.*