



**8th Annual Parks Advocacy Day
May 20, 2010
Breakout Session Notes**

Parks Advocacy Day (PAD) is an annual event that brings diverse advocates from all over New York City together on behalf of parks, playgrounds, beaches, community gardens, and natural areas. The event convenes advocates with their City Council Members and provides the singular opportunity for them to advocate, share local knowledge, and strengthen partnerships. This fosters a citywide coalition united in ensuring that all New Yorkers enjoy a world-class parks system.

The 8th annual PAD was held on May 20th at New York University's Kimmel Center. This year, attendees split up into breakout groups focused on three topics, which were determined by coalition feedback: PlaNYC, concessions, and public-private partnerships. The goal of the breakout sessions was to create the foundation for our work agenda for the coming year around specific citywide issues. Led by community facilitators, participants discussed and mapped their concerns on a local basis, and identified citywide themes to build upon. Below are the notes from the breakout session.

Public Private Partnerships (PPP) Breakout Session

**Facilitated by Matthew Washington, Deputy Director, Friends of Hudson River Park
Notes taken by Juliana R Dubovsky, Government & External Relations Associate, NY4P**

I. Concerns/Suggestions:

- There should be a baseline of what the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) will commit to do as part of the public private partnership. For example, they will cut the grass, paint, open the bathroom, etc. The baseline of services would be standard but people may negotiate each differently to fit their specific park.
- There should be a commitment from the private entity for access in tandem with the agreement.
- Expand the question of "public private partnerships"-Can we give DPR our game plan? Is it really a partnership or it is a parent/educator or more of an equal relationship?
- The agreements should be PUBLIC so that everyone can see the promises made and so that the DPR cannot not change anything afterwards.
- Concern about the term of these agreements and whether they can be tailored to the not for profit organization. There needs to be a baseline and also difference of needs. These could be categorized by the type of parks. The agreement should also consider the duration of the agreement. It should be regularly reviewed. Key ideas of operating agreement: fluid, flexible, transparent, publicly accessible
- How do we find the private corporations willing to join public private partnerships? The Plum Beach/Sheepshead Bay Civic Association is in a similar situation to the Salt Marsh Alliance. It was suggested that groups start with people they know, like local businesses, especially if it is a neighborhood park.
- How do we define the point of these public private partnerships, such as the gains and accomplishments? There is some exclusivity in the taking of public land for private enterprises like some public private partnerships do.

- Partnerships also need to be about mutual respect. From the perspective of a GreenThumb community gardener, they're treated like stepchildren and their efforts are not viewed in the best light. There needs to be more respect for community volunteers.
- T&T Gardens has worked successfully with Tupper Thomas at the Strategic Department for Partnerships. How best can we connect with that department so Ms. Thomas can act as a clearinghouse for information? Unfortunately, she is retiring. Her role is to convene meetings and connect people with DPR. It took 23 years to learn and find the private organizations to support Prospect Park. A national example is the City Parks Alliance which focuses on getting resources for city parks throughout the country.
- For community gardens included in parks, how much support can they expect to get from DPR? It all goes back to the baseline of services.
- What are the basic tools you need in a PPP? Is there a template that organizations can use?
 - Be a 501c3
 - Have a decent accountant
 - Have a meeting once a year for the private corporation
 - Have Trustees
 - Have a dedicated staff
 - And have a strong Board of Directors with Vision

You can never apply an "everything works all the time" generalization to PPP. The benefits of a PPP are that they raise private money for operating and capital improvement budgets. There are many misconceptions on the PPPs. They do provide access to private money for a public good. But you can also get support from Member Items from elected officials, foundations, and volunteers. The DPR needs to support parks with money and bodies, which is what a PPP does.

- How do you overcome the misconceptions of PPPs? Pick something about the partnership that stands out. For example, the Bronx River Alliance takes cars out of the river. Show that you are doing a specific thing to support DPR's mission. Then is privately renting out public space that will benefit that public space ok? New parks now have to fund their own operating funds and find creative ways to do that.
- There is a concept of exclusivity in the branding of parks with PPPs names. Is there a distance created in that between the park managing entity and the park user? Is there some way to fundraise without all the branding?
- Some PPPs make it difficult for non partnership groups to get to DPR with issues. In Brooklyn, there's a group that is a PPP and is employed by the DPR, and there is one person wearing 2 hats, which creates a "czar." They were able to close the Red Gate Garden in McCarren Park without community input. Where's the Community Board on this?
- What is the public's position in this partnership? Do we add, help and give back when they need us to?
- There is a general public concern for transparency for new and exist PPPs.
- Does the private sector get any deductions or incentives for joining PPPs?
- There should be more oversight but from whom? How can we study the success ones (BIDs and PPPs?)
- What happens when/if not for profits like the New York Restoration Project decline? They're better caretakers than the government!
- How can we know how the funds that raised are being used?

II. Common Themes:

- Terms of the partnership must be defined and agreed upon for both parties. If the PPP did not exist, identify what the park would have.
- Create a joint mission statement with the partnership and include a third, non partial party to look at the agreement and counter the road blocks.
- More transparency and oversight of public private partnerships but we're not sure who it should come from. The public needs to know where the money raised is going.
- Mutual respect and admiration for all parties involved in the partnership since parks are public spaces and publicly funded.
- There is a need for a mentorship program that provides opportunities to network and learn from successful PPPs. It should foster collaboration and support between independent organization and friends of groups. Need many groups involved since there is no "one size fits all" model.
- More accountability