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PARKS 2030: World Class Parks for All New Yorkers



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Parks are essential to life in New York City. They bring joy to families, connect neighbors, and strengthen communities. At a time when the United States—and much of the world—feels increasingly polarized, New York City’s parks remain one of the few spaces where people can build bridges and relationships.

What’s more, NYC’s parks deliver critical [economic, environmental, and public health benefits](#). They generate billions for the city and save billions more in avoided costs.

New York City has the resources to build the best parks system in the country—and history shows it can be done. The city’s most revered mayors prioritized parks, democratized public space, and ensured a better quality of life for every New Yorker.

But where do our parks stand now?

In a city battling record inequality, extreme heat and flooding, and declining quality of life, parks are not a luxury—they are essential infrastructure. Yet for decades, parks have been underfunded, understaffed, and unevenly maintained. In the last four years alone, the Parks Department has faced continued disinvestment, causing our parks system to tumble in national rankings. Today, just 65% of city parks meet the agency’s Vital Parks goals for cleanliness, safety, and accessibility—with neighborhoods in the outer boroughs faring far worse.

New Yorkers demand change and vision. We demand leadership that invests in green jobs and the essential workers who care for our parks; where every neighborhood thrives with well-maintained, safe spaces; where families have access to free events and programming; and where parks lead the way on climate change mitigation, biodiversity, and environmental justice.

The next Mayor can change the trajectory of the city by committing to Parks 2030. New York City deserves the best public parks system in the nation—the system New Yorkers need and deserve.

PARKS 2030

1.

Thriving Parks with a Thriving Workforce in Every Neighborhood

Too many parks across NYC are neglected, especially in lower-income neighborhoods. The next Mayor can reverse this injustice by investing in the workforce needed to care for, secure, and enliven parks across the city. A fully staffed Parks Department would ensure that every park reaches the agency's target Vital Parks Conditions Score of 95%, improving quality of life for every New Yorker. How?

- Parkies in every park. Permanent full-time maintenance staff in our parks means cleaner bathrooms, mowed lawns, less trash, and safer environments for our children.
- A full and expanded Urban Park Rangers and Parks Enforcement Patrol corps to ensure our parks are welcoming, safe and accessible for New Yorkers.
- Expanded free public programming in parks and recreation centers like after-school care, yoga, sports leagues, and community events—so that parks continue to thrive as active, affordable hubs of daily life.
- A forestry division that can properly care for street trees and trees in our parks.
- Natural Areas staff to care for our [urban forests](#), [trails](#) and [wetlands](#), opening these spaces to millions of New Yorkers.
- Lifeguards so every beach and pool can be fully open to New Yorkers seeking relief from the heat.
- Support for volunteers through a fully funded Partnership for Parks, and Green Thumb staff supporting community gardens.
- Well maintained bathrooms, water fountains, and basic infrastructure.

2.

Fund Parks Like We Mean It

NYC's parks system is chronically underfunded, despite generating billions in public benefits. While most major cities dedicate 2–5% of their budgets to parks, NYC has been stuck at just 0.6%—trailing the nation in nearly every park metric. Eight of the 10 best park systems in the country benefit from dedicated tax-based funding, while NYC's relies on annual budget battles and short-term fixes. 1% for Parks is more than a tagline—it's a vision for a system where every New Yorker has access to safe, clean, and green parks staffed and programmed to meet community needs. How?

- Dedicate [1% of the city budget to Parks](#). There is no substitute for public dollars for our parks.
- [Expand concessions, sponsorship, and venue surcharge opportunities](#) with fees returning to NYC Parks to be allocated equitably across the system.
- Require or incentivize new developments to contribute to nearby parks and recreation facilities or fund the creation of new green spaces in areas without access today.
- Explore innovative, long-term funding tools like dedicated taxes or surcharges, park bonds, and improvement districts—to ensure our parks are cared for today and protected for the future.
- Ensure all revenue generated in parks, goes to the parks department, on top of a baseline funding commitment from the administration.

3.

Build New Parks— New Yorkers Need More Open Space!

Despite New York City’s nearly 2,000 parks, miles of beaches, millions of trees, and thousands of acres of urban forest, access remains unequal. Families in low-income neighborhoods have 38% less park space. It’s been nearly two decades since the city last had a bold plan to build new parks—now is the time for that vision. How?

- Empower the Chief Public Realm Officer to work with NYC Parks and other agencies to directly address the disparity in open space access citywide, and to streamline the process for solving this disparity.
- Focus new park construction in communities with the [least amount of green space](#).
- Build one new 20-acre park in each borough so every New Yorker has access to a large park.
- Invest in and support open space alternatives to parks including 500 more [Community Schoolyards](#), Open Streets, and [implementation of the Greater Greenways plan](#).
- Secure New York City’s share of state Environmental Bond Act capital funding for parks, and State and Federal Funding.
- Track parkland loss to alienation and make it public.

4.

Cut the Red Tape!

From bathrooms that cost \$5M and trees that cost \$3K, to park projects and repairs that drag on for years, to delayed permits and byzantine contract requirements for nonprofit partners, the Parks Department is short-staffed and mired in inefficiency. These issues drain budgets and delay access to open space. The city can do better. How?

- Charge the First Deputy Mayor with meaningfully reducing red tape!

- Follow through on the [Capital Process Task Force’s recommendations](#) to adopt new project delivery tools for faster and more cost-effective construction.
- Ensure that other entities with oversight over the capital process, including the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Mayor’s Office of Contract Services (MOCS), and Office of the NYC Comptroller speed projects up rather than slowing them down.
- Invest in third party solutions for bathrooms and other amenities to ensure quick roll out.
- Streamline partner agreements and reduce insurance requirements for volunteers, not for profit partners and conservancies to make it easier to steward parks.
- Make it EASY to obtain permits for programming and events in parks.

5.

Make Parks the First Tool in Climate Mitigation

Parks already save NYC billions by cooling neighborhoods, absorbing stormwater, and cleaning the air. With real vision from City leadership, they can do even more—leading NYC’s climate mitigation strategies, making our city cooler and more resilient to flooding. Parks can be our frontline defense against the climate crisis. How?

- Achieve the [Urban Forest Plan](#)’s goal of 30% tree canopy coverage, and do it by 2035, prioritizing the most heat-vulnerable communities, by working with city agencies and the private sector.
- Manage restore and expand natural areas to [mitigate extreme heat](#) and [stormwater impacts](#), and support habitat health and biodiversity.
- [Build/rebuild parks in flood-prone waterfront districts](#) to include storm surge and flooding mitigation (as Hoboken has done).
- Create more designated (mapped) parkland when a voluntary, managed retreat program is developed by the City.