



**New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation  
Hearing: Preliminary Budget Hearing  
March 27, 2018  
Lynn Kelly, Executive Director**

Good afternoon. My name is Lynn Kelly, the Executive Director for New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). I would like to thank the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation for inviting us to speak about the fiscal year 2019 Preliminary Budget. For over 100 years NY4P has protected and promoted open space across the city. Today we are the only independent non-profit organization championing quality open space for all New Yorkers. Our advocacy is based on sound research and data and direct input from the many community based organizations, parks advocates, gardeners and ‘parkies’ we engage with on a daily basis in all five boroughs.

Last year, with the collective feedback gathered at annual borough and citywide meetings we created the Public Realm Bill of Rights for NYC (attached). This document has become the bedrock of our advocacy as it lays out what we believe are the core principles the City should follow in creating and maintaining quality open space for all. **Simply put NY4P believes parks are critical city infrastructure and thus should be maintained, funded, programmed and planned for accordingly.** To that end, we are very pleased to see the City has added 21 new full time baseline positions for FY2019. This addition of staff will help greatly to ensure better maintenance at the corresponding completed Community Parks Initiative Sites where they are assigned. Fixed maintenance staff – the optimum staffing model - provides increased security, or ‘eyes in the park’ and a familiar face to local residents.

**In tandem with these positions, we believe that the baselining of \$9.6M by the City to retain 100 City Parks Workers and 50 Gardeners throughout the city is a critical addition to the FY2019 budget. Unfortunately this is the third year in a row that NY4P is fighting to keep these 150 vital maintenance and operation lines.** We are grateful that the City Council has been able to fill this gap each year but we cannot keep relying on the Council to add this funding. The failure to baseline these positions also leaves 150 New Yorkers unsure of their employment status, without a path to remaining as committed park workers and growing their careers. These workers help to keep our neighborhood parks well maintained and are essential to each borough. We urge the Administration to baseline these positions. This modest investment in the ‘infrastructure of the people’ will go a long way in caring properly for our parks and playgrounds and supporting a caring and dedicated parks workforce.

**Similarly, we support a planned increase in hours and salaries for Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) Officers and Urban Park Rangers (Rangers).** We hope that this improvement fosters a more permanent pipeline of dedicated ‘parkies’ serving our City. The PEP and Rangers programs provide our city parks with ambassadors to the natural world, a pressing need as the realities of climate change and urban population

density become more and more evident. And did you know that many of the long-time staff members at NYC parks started their careers as PEP officers or Rangers? Creating a career path for park enthusiasts, we feel, is critical to the success of the Parks Department and our city as a whole.

**We are pleased to see the renewed allocation of approximately \$2.5M committed toward tree care including tree pruning and stump removal, particularly in the wake of so many devastating winter storms.** We know that caring for our urban canopy pays dividends in long-term public health benefits, from cleaning our air, helping to capture our storm water, and providing New Yorkers with small amounts of mental respite from our dense, urban environment.

**With the demonstrated success of Crotona Park's trash management program, we hope that NYC Parks will be able to implement more specialized zone management programs for maintenance system-wide.** We would urge both the Administration and Council that more funds be allocated to this area to create more specialized maintenance teams, such as baseball field maintenance teams for example, to increase the scope and impact of this program.

**On the capital side, one of the strongest statements the Parks Department has made is its ongoing investment in the Community Parks and Anchor Parks Initiatives.** These programs are having transformative impacts in the communities where they are located. We strongly urge the Council to work with the Administration to increase funding to CPI so that these strategic investments in largely underserved and "under-parked" communities can thrive again.

**However, we remain very concerned about the increasing time delays and mounting aggravation that all sides are feeling with respect to the capital projects process.** It is not just the public and the Council; the Department itself is frustrated. While the Parks Department often is the recipient of everyone's frustration it is important to note that there are steps in the process outside of the control of the Parks Department that can add significant delays to a project. We look forward to a fruitful discussion about ways the capital process can be vastly improved at the upcoming Parks Committee hearing.

**In closing, we understand that our great city has many critical needs requiring significant funding – education, housing, social services, transportation and parks. Each is a necessary component of a healthy, vibrant and livable city.** However, when you prioritize one over another you create a false narrative about what is needed and this creates an imbalance for all New Yorkers. Please work with us today to achieve a fair and equitable budget for our City's parks as they are a key component of a thriving city.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. We look forward to working with the City to create the best budget achievable for parks to benefit all New Yorkers. I'm happy to answer any questions the Council might have.