



**New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation & Committee on Finance
Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 13, 2020
Emily Walker, Director of Outreach & Programs**

Good afternoon. My name is Emily Walker, and I am the Director of Outreach and Programs for New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). Our organization is a founding member of the Play Fair Coalition. Many of our Coalition partners are with us today to testify about the importance of adequately funding our parks, and we thank the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation for inviting us to speak about the fiscal year 2021 Preliminary Budget.

Last year, the City Council and Mayor made a historic investment of \$44M to increase the expense budget for NYC Parks. We were thrilled with the Mayor's \$10M commitment to finally baseline 100 City Park Workers and 50 Gardeners, and remain incredibly grateful to the City Council for adding over \$31M to the final FY20 budget. The Council's addition created over 340 new jobs within NYC Parks, including 100 City Park Workers, 50 Gardeners, 80 Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) officers, 50 Urban Park Rangers, 47 Natural Resources Group staff, and 15 new GreenThumb staff. The impact of this funding has been felt throughout the five boroughs. We testify today to relay the urgent need to baseline this funding, so that these 340-plus New Yorkers can remain employed beyond June 30th of this year.

Last year's additional funding was just a start toward addressing decades of chronic disinvestment in our city's park system. Today we urge you to not just preserve last year's hard-fought funding, but to continue to fight for additional resources for NYC Parks.

Today, we ask the City to commit an additional \$200M to the preliminary budget for parks: a \$100M increase in the expense budget, like we asked for last year, and a \$100M increase in the capital budget. NY4P and the Play Fair Coalition firmly believe that now is the time for the City to invest in both the infrastructure of our parks and the people that keep them clean, safe, and beautiful. Now is the time to Play Fair for Parks.

What would an investment of \$100M in the expense budget get us? It allows the City to invest in critically-needed maintenance and operations, as well as expand opportunities for recreation and programming in communities citywide. It means investments in the safety of our parks, and funding to help ensure our parks and gardens are at the forefront of preserving NYC's nature and resiliency. We have attached the details of the Play Fair Campaign's platform to this testimony today.

The most critical need is to make the 342 jobs created by funding from the Council permanent. These positions must be baselined by the Administration – it is unfair for neighborhoods citywide who now see the results of increases in staff to lose those benefits, and it is unfair to the hard-working, new Parks employees.

For the second year, we are asking for funding to place fixed-post crews at all eligible NYC Parks properties, and to expand the zone management program to serve more of our city's largest parks. We also ask that the City increase the seasonal Kids In Motion after-school program to all eligible playgrounds citywide, almost quintupling its reach from 100 playgrounds citywide to 495.

The Play Fair Coalition's new expense asks center on meeting the chronic maintenance and operations needs of our city's parks and gardens. We support funding to create pathways to permanent employment for top-performing Parks Opportunity Program (POP) participants as City Seasonal Aides, creating a comfort station improvement crew to upgrade bathrooms without the need for intense capital investment, and funding to bring sorely-needed maintenance and operations equipment to every Council District in the City. We also ask the City to commit funding to hire additional full-time staff to expedite the citywide Needs Assessment of our parks infrastructure, which is critically underfunded. We ask the City to fund additional recreation center staff for after-school programming – this complements the Mayor's own goal of increasing rec center hours citywide, and provides a healthy outlet for kids and families in some of NYC's highest-need communities. The creation of a dedicated natural turf management crew will ensure that our heavily used ballfields citywide receive the care and maintenance needed to maximize use. Finally, investments in more staff for the Partnerships for Parks program ensures that the community groups volunteering to care for our parks citywide will have the resources they need to maximize their incredible contributions.

Last year, the Council funded improvements and resources for community gardens citywide. This was an important and necessary first step, intended to benefit all community gardens and gardeners, who help build healthier neighborhoods across the City. We call on the City to maintain this investment, but also ask that this funding truly reach every community garden. Community gardeners have helped create resilient neighborhoods for decades, and their work deserves recognition and investment. We call on the Council to help ensure that this funding is reaching them all.

As our City grapples with the crisis of climate change, we also believe the need to continue investing in our forests and natural areas will be critical now and in the years ahead. We hope the City will continue to recognize the importance of these spaces, and fund them as such.

This year, the Play Fair Coalition recognizes the need to draw attention to targeted and necessary investments in the Parks capital budget as well. There is an opportunity for the Mayor to cement the legacy of the incredibly successful Community Parks Initiative. An investment of \$52M for this upcoming fiscal year means that 10 neighborhood parks and playgrounds can be completely rebuilt in communities that need it most. Additionally, NY4P has long called for the City to create a flexible pot of funding for NYC Parks to use for capital improvements at their discretion. Investing just over \$39M would help create a stream of funding to make NYC Parks more efficient and timely with its backlog of infrastructure improvements.

I will end by repeating our call to action from last year - in a city that champions equity, we must treat our parks, gardens, and open space as critical city infrastructure, which also means investing in the infrastructure of the thousands of people who care for them day-in and day-out. We are here today as a member of the Play Fair Coalition, backed by over 230 organizations, representing all boroughs and thousands of New Yorkers. We ask that the Council join us in advocating for this \$200M investment to the FY21 budget for NYC Parks. 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.



Year 2/FY21 Budget Platform

\$100M to invest in the Expense Budget for NYC Parks

\$74.95M to invest in critical Maintenance and Operations

- **\$10M** to baseline the new 100 City Park Worker and 50 Gardener staff lines added in the FY20 budget.
- **\$5.5M** to create a pathway to full-time employment for 100 Parks Opportunity Program participants citywide.
- **\$3M** to create an in-house comfort station improvement team to target a comfort station in every borough, with 18 full-time staff, and 20 seasonal positions.
- **\$2.5M** to bring critically needed maintenance equipment to all 51 Council Districts, including new mowers, Gators, and other equipment needed to ensure NYC Parks maintenance crews have the tools they need.
- **\$950K** to more than double the NYC Parks staff conducting the critically-needed citywide Capital Needs Assessment, decreasing the timeline on finishing this work to understand where improvements are most needed in our parks system.
- **\$53M** for more full-time, dedicated Parks staff, with \$18M to expand fixed-post crews to all eligible parks citywide (690 total), and \$35M to begin expanding Zone Management crews to the largest parks citywide.

\$8.15M to invest in Recreation and Programming

- **\$4M** in the budget would mean that 395 playgrounds would be able host structured sports and afterschool programs for children in every district. This means structure, safety, and imaginative play for tens of thousands of New York's children and their families.
- **\$1.75M** to hire additional staff for after-school programs at Recreation Centers citywide, which would complement the Administration's goal of extending Recreation Center hours.
- **\$1.8M** to create a Natural Turf Management citywide crew to better maintain and care for our natural turf fields in every borough.
- **\$600K** to hire 10 new Partnerships for Parks Outreach Coordinators to support park stewards and volunteers across the city.

\$9M to invest in Parks Safety

- **\$3M** to baseline and preserve the 50 new Urban Park Ranger positions created in the FY20 budget.
- **\$6M** to baseline and preserve the 80 new Parks Enforcement Patrol positions created in the FY20 budget.

\$7.92M to invest in Nature and Resiliency

- **\$3.4M** to baseline 15 new GreenThumb staff, and expand access to resources and tools for community gardeners citywide.
- **\$4M** to baseline 47 new Natural Resources Group staff to continue conserving and caring for our natural forests.
- **\$520K** to hire 4 full-time crews to conduct targeted lake and pond maintenance and monitoring in parks citywide.

\$100M in Capital Investments for NYC Parks

- **\$52M** to rebuild 10 neighborhood parks and playgrounds throughout the City via the Community Parks Initiative.
- **\$4.8M** to invest in vitally needed structural improvements for GreenThumb Community Gardens citywide, including fence and sidewalk repair, and installation of on-site water at 30 gardens citywide.
- **\$3.8M** to continue critical investments in proactively protecting, conserving, and maintaining our natural forests.
- **\$39.4M** in flexible capital funding for NYC Parks to help complete capital projects and improve parks infrastructure citywide.

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For over 100 years, [New Yorkers for Parks \(NY4P\)](http://www.ny4p.org) has built, protected, and promoted parks and open spaces in New York City. Today, NY4P is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods.
www.ny4p.org