

An Open Letter to the City Council on the FY 2019 Preliminary Parks Budget, March 27, 2018

Hon. Vanessa L. Gibson, Chair

NYC Council Subcommittee on Capital Budget

Members: Barry S. Grodenchik, Steven Matteo, Keith Powers and Helen K. Rosenthal

Hon. Barry S. Grodenchik, Chair

NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

Members: Andrew Cohen, Andy King, Mark Gjonaj, Peter Koo, Francisco Moya, Costa Constantinides, Jimmy Van Bramer, Eric A. Ulrich, Justin Brannan, Joseph C. Borelli

Dear Chairpersons Gibson and Grodenchik, and Council Members on the Capital Budget Subcommittee and Council Members on the Parks and Recreation Committee,

Please accept these comments toward the NYC Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on the FY2019 Preliminary Budget, Preliminary Capital Plan FY2019-2022, and FY2018 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report. We have reviewed these reports and wish to bring the following to your attention. A review of these documents indicates that funding for the Parks Department is inadequate and requires an increase in Maintenance and Operations (M&O). In the Mayor's Management Report, DPR completed 38 capital projects, with 79 percent completed on time or early and 87 percent within budget. During this period the reconstruction of three Community Parks Initiative sites was completed, all ahead of schedule. We also find that they are at an inadequate level of personnel, including little for project management, design and engineering.

Focusing on construction ignores the need for increasing park maintenance staff to sustain existing facilities. Historically this created a permanent career path for generation of park lovers. Currently, the parks department has adequate capital budget, but is desperately short on M&O. We encourage a one year experiment to:

- Increase Parks Department Expense Budget to 2% of citywide dollar (it is not even close to 1%)
- Fund five In-House maintenance teams (with carpenters, plumbers, electricians, masons, etc.) to do one project per borough for this next year – a proven efficient program
- Build-in Maintenance Funds into Capital Projects, so the construction project is sustainable.

We understand that you are concerned with the capital budget process and timeline, but creating an expensive bureaucracy like the proposed Parks Construction Authority, is not the answer. As some of you know, at the past February Bronx Parks Speak Up, Guest Speaker and former staff member of the Parks Department, Charles McKinney's "We Can Fix That!" speech was well received. The talk was "about simple ways the New York City Council and Mayoral offices could work together to fix the existing system rather than develop a new Parks Construction Authority." Another presentation: "Creative Ideas for Improving Parks," by BCEQ President Joyce Hogi urged members to join the Bronx Council for Environmental Quality and the Bronx Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces to plan a Fall Symposium we call "Learn Up to improve parks."

Why support the creation of an authority that is unaccountable when there are better and less expensive alternatives worth exploring first that will assist all of us in meeting our goals. We can all learn from a review of the report commissioned in 2014 by New Yorkers for Parks for members of the City Council provides 15 clear, actionable steps to improve the on-time on-budget performance of DPR's capital projects without creating an expensive bureaucracy.

Signed by *Karen Argenti, JS Colon, Elizabeth Cooke-Levy, Robert Fanuzzi PhD, John Gillen PhD, Joyce Hogi, Nilka Martell, Dena Robbins PhD, Jane Sokolow, and Laura Spalter*

Attachments: Budget Materials

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