



October 14, 2023

Honorable James Genaro
Chair, New York City Council
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Statement to the Joint Committees on Environmental Protection,
Resiliency & Waterfronts, and on Parks and Recreation Hearing on
October 11, 2023

~~Dear Chairperson Genaro,~~
Jim

Anyone serious about managing Climate Change would increase the DEP, DPR and DOT Budget for Green Infrastructure (GI). Climate Change mitigation is not going to happen on its own, or by constructing buildings, or by cutting funds from important agencies that are poised help. Rain is not the cause of flooding; more hard surfaces is. Hard surfaces do not allow water to drain into the soil. In the highly dense NYC urban environment, the only way is catch up for hundreds of years of building is to “green” every piece of land as fast as you can -- to allow water to drain. By the way, when rain drains underground to the base flow, there is an added advantage of getting clean water! Clean water means healthier people.

I write on behalf of the Bronx Council for Environmental Quality (BCEQ). Founded in 1971, we have sought to establish — as an Inherent Human Right — a sound, forward-looking environmental policy regarding an *aesthetic, unpolluted, environment* protecting a natural and historic heritage. We advocate for improving water quality, developing waterfront greenways and recreational uses, increasing ecosystem services, and restoring shoreline natural habitats, among other things. We successfully urged the DEP, DPR and DOT to work together to build the largest Green Infrastructure in the City in the Tibbetts Brook Daylighting and Greenway. They recreated a natural area at the old run down abandoned railroad.

The goal of your committee, “to make New York City more resilient in the face of climate change, and preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies, and matters relating to the waterfront” is being challenged. Today city government is not doing much to solve climate change challenges and, in fact, the latest cuts are making the problem worse. This is an added disadvantage to our economically disadvantage communities who already suffer the most from climate change, and who now from arbitrary budget cuts which delay the important work of recreating natural areas in the little space left in our city.

New York City government created the severe climate change we are experiencing now. If you continue to build on every spare square foot, how can the rain get into the ground? You have a math problem and should look at it that way. If you keep buying suits without replacing old ones, soon there will be no room in the closet. If you buy a new closet to hold your new suits, soon you will have no space to walk in the home. Make every change in imperviousness a cost. By the way, have you reviewed the enforcement and effectiveness of DEP’s new Unified Stormwater Rules? Or is it only another paper rule?

Use this opportunity to stand up to the proposed cuts and offer realistic choices. Discretionary budgets of agencies that are not “needed,” can be put on pause for a few years. Choose to cut anything that causes more carbon and greenhouse gas than other services. One group that comes to mind is New Housing. During the pandemic the construction of affordable housing was exempt from

budgetary cuts, while most agency budgets, including capital construction, was not. Developers had their chance. Now is the time to help those in need, and not those in search of greed.

We call on you to reject Mayor Adams perverse order of priorities for a general cut, when there are a few agencies that can survive a few years without funding. An added benefit would be that there would be less capital work for DDC and they would eventually become more efficient. No need for another Authority – one more power grab of the public's transparency.

If we allow these agencies to help manage climate change, this has the double benefit of maintaining more city jobs to do the necessary work to manage climate change, is in sync with the goals of this committee. *More people working* in full-time city employment with a career path and a pension, can manage the landscape for more environmentally productive parks, open spaces, and trees. They will build and maintain green infrastructure, to clean out drains and pick up garbage before rain storms. They can design waterfronts peppered with green infrastructure upland and living shorelines along the 520 miles of the city's waterfront. They will build natural-nature-based-systems with zero discharge can help manage the big storms.

We will have the opportunity to change the pace of progress in mitigating climate change by recognizing that the city's drainage system built for 90% of the storms, but only manages 10% of the annual rain; while 90% of the big storms overflow the sewer – and pollute rivers. You know this is needed. It is easy to change the standard design storm for storm sewers, especially for Green Infrastructure (GI), which would be hard to overflow, as it goes into the ground and easily accommodate zero discharge.

In the Bronx, our residents need all kinds of jobs. As we watch rents, food and clothing prices rise our families are suffering. We do not need new housing; we need to fix the housing we live in now. We do not need to you to put a new building in every open space. What we need are trees, green areas, parks, and access to and in the waterfront. Clearly, we need more people working not less.

While all agree to protect our future by cutting down on greenhouse gases. The question is just how much are we willing to give up. Cement manufacturing accounts for 8% of the world's CO2 emissions. Concrete, which is made from cement, is the most widely used substance on Earth — behind only water; the third largest consumer of energy; and the second largest emitter of CO2 when looking at industrial players alone.

As individuals, it is great to recycle, compost, bike, or drive hybrid / EV. Now it is time for industry, government, and transportation networks to step up, too. We need big changes faster. NYC government should take a four year pause on building housing. Halt the discretionary building of “affordable” housing for the future; choose to take care of the people here and now; restore full funding and more to GI agencies mentioned above.

Because rain does not cause flooding. "Hard surfaces that don't drain water result in flooding."

Your friend,



Karen Argenti, Secretary BCEQ