



10%

for Parks Impact Report

Prepared with HR&A Advisors

March 2023



This report was made possible by the **Charles H. Revson Foundation**.

1% for Parks: Impact Report is a publication of New Yorkers for Parks in partnership with HR&A Advisors.



HR&A Advisors, Inc. (HR&A) helps create more equitable, resilient, and dynamic communities.

The firm's work turns vision into action through rigorous analysis, strategy development, and implementation planning. For over forty years HR&A has guided public, private and nonprofit clients in transforming real estate and economic development concepts, and public infrastructure, first into actionable plans then into job-producing, community-strengthening assets. Project Team: Kate Collignon, Jill Schmidt Bengochea, and Shoshana Wintman.



New Yorkers for Parks is an independent citywide organization that advocates for quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers. Established over 100 years ago, we champion equitable development, distribution, and maintenance of open spaces across NYC. Project Team: Adam Ganser, Daniel Abram, Carl Nelson, and Sherrise Palomino.

Board of Directors

Paul R. Gottsegen (Chairman), Bryan Grimaldi (Secretary), Fern Thomas (Treasurer), Gabrielle S. Brussel, Christopher Collins, Margaret A. Doyle, Audrey Feuerstein, Catherine Morrison Golden, George J. Grumbach, Jr., Kyle Kimball, Carol Loewenson, Jonathan Meyers, Lynden B. Miller, Josh Moskowitz, Patricia Ornst, Marlene Pantin, Karol S. Robinson, Alan Steel, Joel Steinhaus, and Mark S. Weprin

Thank you to the following for their helpful insights: Adrian Benepe, Dilcy Benn, Jonathan Bowles, Sarah Charlop-Powers, Susan Chin, Daniel Clay, Candace Damon, Eli Dvorkin, Eric Gibson, Elizabeth Goldstein, Liam Kavanagh, Lynn Kelly, Adena Long, Kathryn Ott Lovell, Heather Lubov, Charlie McCabe, Jonathan Meyers, Jayne Miller, Laura Morand, Marlene Pantin, Joe Puleo, Emily Sherrod, Mitchell Silver, Betsy Smith, Viviana Santiago, Carter Strickland, and K Webster.

A special thank you to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation for the work they do for our City.

And a special thank you to the 400+ Play Fair Coalition members for advocating with us.

Designed by Michael Bierman.

Photos: Larry Allen, Karen Asner, Dilcy Benn, Daniel Clay, Fay Hill, Ed Mundo, Sherrise Palomino, and Regine Polenz

Table of Contents

Letter from New Yorkers for Parks.....	3
Executive Summary: Envisioning NYC Parks with 1%	4
1. About This Report and How Investment in Our Parks Impacts New Yorkers	7
2. The Essential Value of New York City Parks	9
3. NYC Parks—Decades of Disinvestment	13
NYC Parks—An Expansive Portfolio to Operate and Maintain	14
Budget History: 50 Years of Austerity	14
Maintenance Strategy: Straining Labor and Shortchanging New Yorkers	16
Covid Spotlight: A System on the Brink.....	18
Where We Are Now	19
4. Allocating 1% to Our City’s Parks: Opportunities and Impacts	21
Optimize Parks Maintenance for Cleaner Parks and Stronger Communities	24
Preserve and Grow the Urban Tree Canopy and Wetlands as Refuge and Protectors of the City	28
Grow Programs to Directly Serve Communities.....	32
5. A New Age for NYC Parks and New Yorkers	38
Appendix/Glossary	40



Letter from New Yorkers for Parks

New York City has some of the most iconic parks in the world. Residents fortunate enough to live near these parks, and visitors taking a stroll through Central Park, marveling at the High Line, or people watching along the water at Brooklyn Bridge Park might assume that all our parks are managed by robust teams of parks workers keeping these special places looking clean and beautiful. However, unlike these parks, the vast majority of New York City's 1,700+ parks rely solely on city funding, and their conditions and experience couldn't be more different.

Despite dedicated leadership and a tireless workforce at NYC Parks, basic maintenance of our city's parks has been a struggle for more than 40 years. And while leaders continue to champion building new parks, a necessary goal to improve access, the single most important investment the city can make to create a safe, green and equitable parks system is to fund the maintenance of existing parks. What has this historic disinvestment meant for our parks and for New Yorkers? A parks agency that scrapes by to do standard maintenance like cleaning up trash, mowing lawns, cleaning bathrooms, and taking care of the urban forest; unable to provide staff to keep our parks safe, let alone engage with parks visitors; a system that is overwhelmed on peak visitation days in the summer, and by high visitation due to warmer spring and fall; a system unable to adequately provide the programming in recreation centers and parks that so many New Yorkers used to depend on; unable to support the hundreds of volunteer groups that for decades have picked up the city's slack.

New York City can do better. But we need meaningful investment in our parks system to get there.

The 1% for Parks Campaign launched 20 years ago by New Yorkers for Parks and advocates citywide and revived during Covid, is a demand for system change. This report outlines what that investment would mean for our parks, our neighborhoods and for New Yorkers.

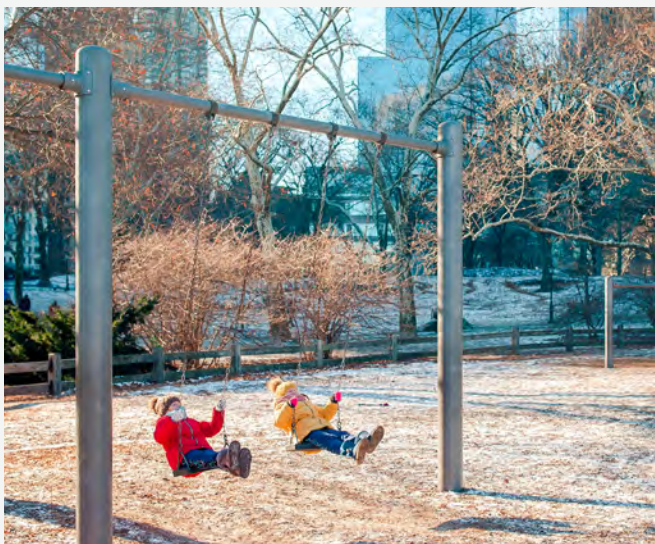
Executive Summary:

Envisioning NYC Parks with 1%

Parks sustain and unify New York City's eight million residents.

Family and friends connect and find joy in our open spaces and picnic areas, from Crotona Park in the Bronx to The Narrows in Staten Island, Seward Park in Manhattan, to Astoria Park in Queens and to Linden Park in Brooklyn. We play and exercise in their fields and recreation centers, and de-stress in their green spaces. Children explore and learn in playgrounds and natural areas. Parks uniquely bring together all the individuals who make up our diverse communities, forging our civic bonds and identity. The pandemic elevated the importance of city parks, and they remain a priority to New Yorkers as the city recovers.

The NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) manages and maintains the city's 30,000-acre parks system. But the agency lacks the resources for this critical job. NYC Parks' \$624 million operating budget today comprises only 0.6% of New York City's operating budget, down from 1.4% in the 1960s and 1.3% in the 1970s.^{1,2}



In comparison, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago allocate 1.5% to 4.0% of their budgets to park operations and maintenance.³ NYC Parks' operating budget is the critical, sole source of funding for the agency's day-to-day operations—the daily staffing, maintenance, programming, and tools vital to operating and maintaining the city parks system. With insufficient funding, NYC Parks relies on a skeletal permanent workforce, creating persistent challenges for the New Yorkers who depend on parks as their backyards.

New Yorkers for Parks and its partners are calling on the city to increase funding to NYC Parks to 1% of the city operating budget or, effectively, \$1 billion per year. This report identifies the opportunities that 1% to NYC Parks would create to fix challenges felt across the parks system today.



As a frontline agency whose interaction with New Yorkers defines residents' and visitors' experience of the city, NYC Parks has done the best it can with available resources. But constrained staffing of maintenance workers—coupled with \$590 million in deferred maintenance standing between the parks system and a State of Good Repair as of Fiscal Year 2022⁴—means New Yorkers cannot count on clean parks during visitation spikes, safe, working playground equipment, or the presence of a familiar NYC Parks worker stationed at their neighborhood park. Constrained funding for natural areas, street trees, and horticulture means NYC has only one gardener for every 114 acres—compared to one for every 18 acres in Chicago and San Francisco—and can't adequately protect and grow the urban forest that cleans our air, filters our stormwater, and cools our neighborhoods. Minimal funding for recreation centers means they operate more like gyms than the neighborhood community centers they could be, and cuts to other park programming mean New Yorkers miss out on opportunities to connect with each other and explore activities that support physical and mental well-being. With expense funding equivalent to 1% of the city operating budget, NYC Parks could increase its permanent, full-time workforce to:

1.

Optimize parks maintenance for cleaner parks and stronger communities.

2.

Preserve and grow the urban tree canopy and wetlands as refuge and protectors of the city.

3.

Grow programs to directly serve communities.

For New Yorkers, allocating 1% of the city operating budget to NYC Parks would ensure:

- ✔ **Clean parks** throughout the year. No overflowing trash bins and litter. Well-maintained lawns and horticulture. Clean bathrooms with extended hours. Well-maintained dog runs and play equipment.
- ✔ **Safe parks** with parks employees developing relationships with the communities they work in. Parks staffed with familiar workers who work with and become part of the community. Safe public bathrooms where parents can feel comfortable taking their children. Parks free of used injection needles.
- ✔ **Quick repairs** avoiding longer closures and ensuring accessibility.
- ✔ **Comprehensive access to the city's 10,000 acres of natural areas and trails** and the abundant educational and recreational opportunities they provide.
- ✔ **Protected vulnerable wetlands** amid a changing climate and **expanded public access** to these vital resources.
- ✔ **Cleaner air and relief from the heat** provided by a protected and thriving urban forest.
- ✔ **Faster responses to 311 service requests** for trees and larger, safer teams for the workers addressing them.
- ✔ **New Yorkers of all ages enjoying free cultural and recreational programs** across our entire parks system.
- ✔ **Free, exciting programs for children at the city's recreation centers**, in more active and better maintained spaces to teach, entertain, and play.
- ✔ Opportunities for the broad network of **volunteers to expand programming in their community parks.**

For NYC Parks and its workers, increased staffing would result in:

- ✔ **A 21st Century parks system and agency** that meets and exceeds the needs of New Yorkers.
- ✔ An agency that fully takes advantage of **technology to measure, manage and optimize** the stewardship of our city's parks.
- ✔ An agency that can **cultivate staff growth and retention**, resulting in greater day-to-day efficiency.
- ✔ **Pride among NYC Parks workers** with deeper expertise and stronger ties to the communities they serve.
- ✔ **Improved safety and conditions for workers**, and more support to manage the challenges associated with illegal activity, drug use and homelessness in parks.
- ✔ **Earlier and faster repairs**, avoiding more difficult and expensive capital costs in repairs later.





1

About This Report and How Investment in Our Parks Impacts New Yorkers

The 30,000 acres of parks under NYC Parks' jurisdiction serve as backyards to more than eight million New Yorkers, yet their maintenance is severely underfunded. Since the NYC Parks operating budget was dramatically reduced in the late 1970s, the agency has done its best to maintain the parks system with operating costs between 0.5 to 0.6% of the city's annual budget.⁵

Insufficient funding has led to deferred maintenance, a reliance on private organizations and community groups for additional funding at the cost of equity, reduced city-led programming, and an expansive parks system that has far greater potential to provide New Yorkers with vital space for recreation, wellness, and community building.

New Yorkers for Parks, advocates, and communities have been calling on the city to increase funding of NYC Parks to 1% of the city operating budget, a necessary investment that Mayor Adams committed to during his 2021 campaign.⁶

This funding increase would provide an additional \$384 million, enabling the agency to rethink its existing models and allocations to more effectively support every New Yorker's need for accessible, safe, green spaces.

This report describes the operations and maintenance challenges that NYC Parks faces today and identifies investment opportunities and impacts for New Yorkers associated with a funding increase to 1% of the city's operating budget. The document serves as a resource for policymakers, advocates, and residents to understand the

existing opportunities to strengthen the parks system and the potential for a fully resourced operating budget. We developed these recommendations through conversations with long-time leaders and advocates in the NYC Parks community, non-profit stakeholders, and leaders in parks management from across the U.S., as well as analysis of publicly available data and a review of third-party reports cited throughout.



2

The Essential Value of New York City Parks

In addition to providing venues for recreational, social, and civic gathering, New York City's parks system is essential for our public health, environmental resiliency, and economic vitality.

Public Health Benefits

Parks support our mental and physical health, build community, and foster cohesion and social resilience.

Access to safe and clean parks increases both mental health and social cohesion by providing community members space to gather and relax within nature.⁷

In the densest city in the United States, where few residents have a backyard, parks are critical for New Yorkers' physical well-being. Access to active recreation space in parks reduces annual health care costs in New York City by \$1.14 billion.⁸ Regular physical activity has been

shown to increase positive outcomes across a variety of public health indicators including diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.⁹ Further, parks have been associated with reducing mortality.¹⁰ Parks allow New Yorkers to reconnect, reduce stress, and find spiritual healing in the natural world. Research shows that just two hours per week in greenspace can have positive impacts on an individual's sense of well-being and happiness.¹¹ Further, city parks, with their tree canopies and lawns, spray showers, pools, and beaches; provide essential cooling resources in a city where 370 residents die of extreme heat or conditions greatly exacerbated by extreme heat each year.¹²

\$1.14 Billion

Annual reductions to health care costs in NYC owed to access to recreation space within parks.

Environmental Benefits

As New York City adapts to sea level rise and extreme heat, parks, natural areas and street trees serve a critical role in the city's resilience.

The toll of extreme heat, without intervention, will only increase as average temperatures continue to rise. Parks can reduce peak ambient temperatures by 2–9° while shade provided by the urban tree canopy can reduce peak ambient temperatures by 20–45°F.¹³ Climate change is bringing sea level rise and more intense storms to the region, leading to increased coastal and inland flooding. Each year, the New York City parks system diverts 4.49 billion gallons of storm water from the NYC DEP managed sewer system, saving the city nearly \$9 million annually in avoided water treatment costs.¹⁴ 30% of NYC Parks property exists on the coastline and one-third of the parks system is natural areas.¹⁵ These diverse coastal ecosystems under the care of NYC Parks have the

potential to defend coastal communities against storm surge-induced flooding. Parks also play a critical role in improving air quality across the city and are an important tool for carbon capture, with individually managed trees—including both street trees and trees in landscaped park spaces—collectively storing 1.6 billion tons of carbon dioxide each year.¹⁶ Large parks such as Van Cortlandt in the Bronx and Forest Park in Queens help mitigate the impacts of particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, and other pollutants from industry and infrastructure like the Jackie Robinson Expressway, Major Deegan Expressway, and Henry Hudson Parkway.¹⁷ The trees under NYC Parks' management are estimated to provide environmental and health benefits totaling \$681 million per year.¹⁸

\$681 Million

Annual value of environmental benefits provided by street trees in New York City.

Economic Benefits

Parks generate economic benefits for the city and its residents, improving our quality of life. They retain the city's workforce, draw visitors to recreational opportunities and programmed events, and increase city revenue to support public services. Flagship parks like Central Park and the High Line, and events like the U.S. Open in Flushing Meadows Corona Park and Summer Stage in community parks across the city attract

thousands to New York City each year. Our parks attract over \$17 billion in tourism spending and over \$600 million in the recreation industry each year, revenue which supports the jobs of 4,336 New Yorkers.¹⁹ Additionally, proximity to parks increases the desirability of a location, raising property values and resulting in greater property tax revenue to local jurisdictions. New York City has seen \$15.2 billion in increased property value and a subsequent \$101 million in annual property tax revenues for homes within 500 feet of a park, demonstrating how much New Yorkers value and seek out access to city parks.^{20,21}

\$17 Billion

Annual spending from tourism in NYC Parks attractions.

New York City parks provide tremendous social, environmental, and economic benefits that warrant care and maintenance of these spaces.





3

NYC Parks— Decades of Disinvestment

NYC Parks—An Expansive Portfolio to Operate and Maintain

NYC Parks manages more than 30,000 acres of parks and natural areas—one of the largest parks systems in the country—with a severely under-resourced budget. The agency’s operating budget funds all non-capital costs to maintain and operate the parks system, including general maintenance and operations (mowing, picking up trash, cleaning, pruning, etc.), horticulture and natural areas management, community programming and associated facilities such as recreation centers, seasonal amenities (beaches and public pools), and more.²² As a frontline agency where the majority of staff are boots on the ground maintaining this civic infrastructure each day, an insufficient budget has translated to decades of austerity-level staffing and, as a result, less effective maintenance strategies.

Budget History: 50 Years of Austerity

NYC Parks manages the parks system with a severely inadequate operating budget, which constricts staffing and forces reliance on inferior maintenance and operating models. The current budget for the parks system can be traced back to the fiscal crises in the 1970s and 1980s. NYC Parks received 1.4% of the city budget in the 1960s and 1.3% in 1976. In the late 1970s the agency’s budget was cut to between 0.5% and 0.6%, where it remains today.^{23, 24} In Fiscal Year 2023, the city allocated \$624 million of expense funding to the agency, roughly 0.6% of the city’s operating budget. By comparison, other major cities allocate up to 5% of their operating budgets to parks departments and dedicate up to three times the amount of funding per capita toward parks operations.²⁵



“I go to [my park in the Bronx] today because it reminds me of my childhood. As an adult, I see

the garbage on the ground and overflowing, I see this needs to be kept up. It’s not [cared for like] when I was a kid.”

Larry Allen, Bushwick Inlet Volunteer

NYC Parks by the Numbers

2.5M
trees

1,500
acres of salt marsh

7,300
acres of forested natural areas

5,000
parks properties

1,800
basketball courts

1,000+
playgrounds

850
acres of freshwater wetlands

800
athletic fields

550
tennis courts

65
public pools

60
miles of streams

36
recreation centers

10
nature centers

14
miles of beaches

14
golf courses

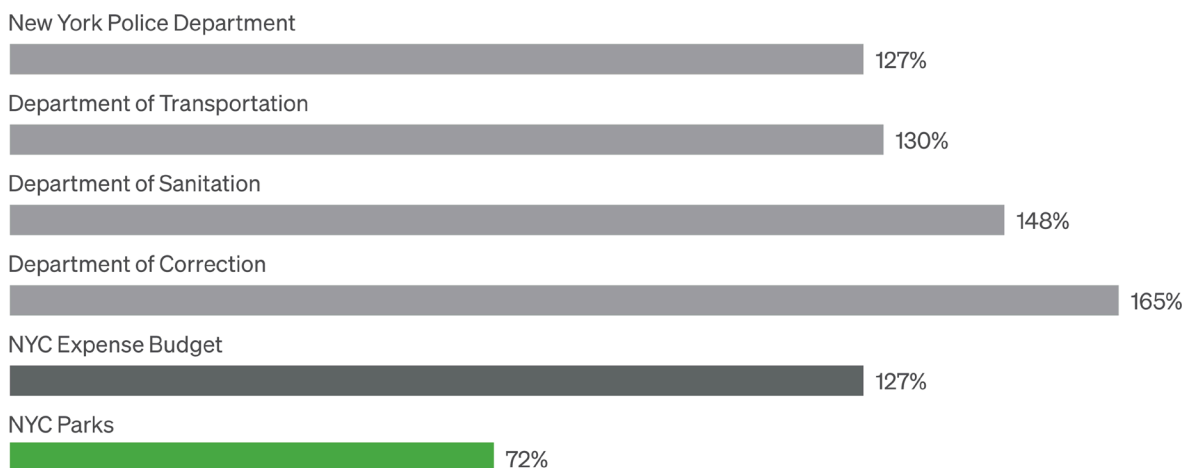
Operating budget of parks departments across major U.S. cities in Fiscal Year 2021.²⁶

The following table shows that New York City has the lowest funding for parks per capita and share of overall operating budgets among peer cities.

City	Parks Operating Budget as a Share of the City Operating budget	Park Area (Acres)	Parks Operating Budget per Capita
Minneapolis, MN	5.3%	5,000	\$231
Chicago, IL	4.3%	9,000	\$155
Los Angeles, CA	2.9%	16,000	\$78
San Francisco, CA	1.6%	4,000	\$245
Washington, DC	1.1%	1,000	\$151
New York, NY (TODAY)	0.6%	30,000	\$72
New York, NY (at 1%)	1.0%	30,000	\$119

Parks department budgets nationally are cut deeper and faster in times of fiscal austerity, and NYC Parks has been no exception. Moreover, when such cuts take place, departments take an average of seven years to recover their workforce capacity.²⁷ As the city's economic health and population have recovered over the last four decades, an increased tax base has supported an increased municipal budget and workforce. However, NYC Parks' budget has not kept pace with this growth. Between 1980 and 2021, the city experienced a 127% growth in annual expenditures from \$49 billion to \$111 billion.²⁸ During this time, the NYC Parks budget grew by just 72%. By comparison, the New York Police Department budget grew 127%, the Department of Transportation budget grew 130%, the Department of Sanitation budget grew 148%, the Department of Correction budget grew 165%, and the Department of Education budget grew 233%.²⁹

City & Agency Budget Growth, 1980-2021



As the NYC Parks budget declined in the 1970s, residents organized independently to address shortfalls in the city’s management, motivated by a commitment to and dependence on their local neighborhood parks.

Communities throughout the city galvanized to reclaim their parks in response to increasing crime and deteriorating conditions as a result of disinvestment. Those efforts continue today with hundreds of formal and informal community groups, most of which are led by volunteers.³⁰ A small number of private conservancies expertly maintain a handful of the city’s largest parks and serve as a national model. However, the overwhelming majority of the 1,700 parks citywide are operated and maintained by NYC Parks.

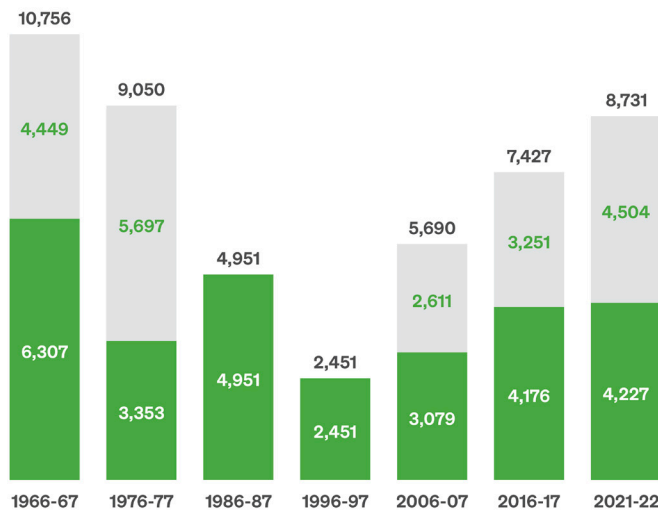
Maintenance Strategy: Straining Labor and Shortchanging New Yorkers

NYC Parks’ budget never recovered from the cuts made in the 1970s, and as a result, neither has its workforce. The agency employed 11,000 full-time equivalent employees in the late 1960s, but only 8,200 in Fiscal Year 2023, of which 4,830 are full-time, permanent employees.^{31,32,33,34} As a result, the agency relies on a maintenance model that is based on expediency rather than the needs of the public or its workforce.

NYC Parks Staffing since FY 1967³⁵

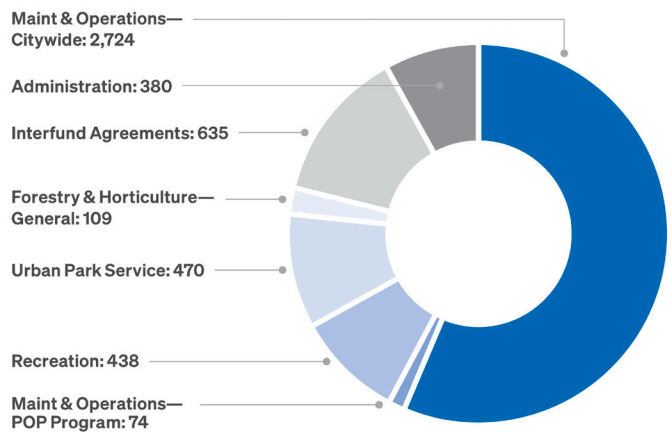
NYC Parks full-time staffing fell from an average of 11,000 full-time equivalent employees (FTE) in the late 1960s to 4,830 FTE in Fiscal year 2023. Seasonal and temporary FTEs are not available for the 1980s or 1990s.

- Full-Time Equivalent Employees (Seasonal/Temporary)
- Full-Time Budgeted Employees (Permanent/Year-Round)



NYC Parks Permanent Workforce by Division in FY 2023³⁶

Three-quarters of the NYC Parks operating budget is for personnel, reflecting that the department is a frontline agency in which funding allocations directly affect staffing in the field. The remaining quarter of the budget is for non-personnel, including contracts and equipment-related expenses, as shown in the pie chart below. See page 40 for full definitions of categories.³⁷





NYC Parks maintains the parks system with a reduced workforce by relying on mobile work crews and internally established standards for cleaning and inspection. This strategy is an inadequate substitute for a more consistent presence. To accommodate reduced staffing, NYC Parks transitioned from a fixed-post model, a maintenance strategy that stations Parks employees at specific parks full-time, to a mobile crew model in which teams drive to multiple sites daily. The number of times an individual park receives maintenance each week is based on its Service Level Agreement

(SLA).³⁸ NYC Parks cleans all parks to established standards and uses quantifiable metrics to evaluate and monitor quality under the Parks Inspection Program (PIP).

NYC Parks' current maintenance strategy is an expedient solution to maintaining 30,000 acres of parkland on a constrained budget, however, it is not a replacement for the consistent attention of workers regularly tending to the same parks, and its metrics cannot reflect the experience of New Yorkers across the system.

Under these existing operations, one neighborhood park may be cleaned daily with visitors finding green, mowed lawns, trash cleared, and amenities readily available for use. Meanwhile, another neighborhood park may be cleaned to the same standards only once per week without an accountable system to collect strewn trash, monitor plantings, or check for issues at playgrounds, drinking fountains, or benches on the days in between. Moreover, if additional litter or damage appears after a scheduled cleaning, that condition will not be improved until the next scheduled service, negatively impacting park users' experience in the interim.



“Our Coalition was born over 40 years ago to address the consequences of a city unable to care for our park and the people depending on it. We have worked to preserve our low-income communities while keeping this park safe, unique, and welcoming to our neighbors and the public.

I'm proud of our work with Parks but dismayed to see a similar lack of resources thwarting the common need for belonging, respite, greenery, and safety that we faced many years ago resurfacing. Our parks need help.”

K Webster, President, Sara Roosevelt Park Community Coalition

Covid Spotlight: A System on the Brink

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated persistent challenges for the parks system. First, it demonstrated how fragile NYC Parks' current operations strategy is. Second, it amplified awareness of the disparate and inequitable conditions across the parks system.

In 2020, the pandemic revealed the risks inherent in cutting parks funding during fiscal downturns when

New Yorkers rely on these spaces most. The city cut \$84 million from the agency's budget in Fiscal Year 2021, forcing NYC Parks to freeze positions across the agency and forego hiring of more than 1,700 temporary workers

that would typically protect, maintain, and clean parks during peak season, as well as permanent Urban Park Rangers and Parks Enforcement Patrol officers. Conditions in our parks deteriorated within months.

Understaffing and associated operational concerns across NYC Parks demonstrated that further funding cuts would make it impossible for the agency to fulfill its mission to care for parks and public spaces. The budget cuts led to a reduction of 25,000 maintenance hours per week. Maintenance crews were unable to get to 400 sites per week that they otherwise would clean.³⁹ Parks Inspection Program scores dropped citywide, with a 14% drop in overall condition between August of 2019 and August of 2020.⁴⁰ Over the same period, there was a 120% increase in garbage-related complaints according to 311 data.⁴¹ New Yorkers, who rely on parks to connect with friends and family, exercise, and play found substantial litter and trash accumulation, decreased horticultural care, and overgrown grass lawns.

Reductions to the NYC Parks operating budget during the pandemic revealed inequities in the overall park system, with some boroughs experiencing a disproportionate decline in quality. Parks that are supported by conservancies and are not entirely dependent on the agency for care were able to ensure sustained maintenance.⁴²

“When it comes to the Parks Department, there’s no such thing as a small recession.”

Liam Kavanagh, NYC Parks, 1981-2022; First Deputy Commissioner, 2002-2022



As a result, park conditions in Manhattan—the borough with the most conservancies who manage parks directly—were the least impacted by NYC Parks budget cuts among all boroughs. Manhattan recorded a 1% uptick in overall conditions ratings between 2019 and 2020, and a dip of only 2% between 2020 and 2021. By comparison, the Bronx saw a 5% dip in overall cleanliness between 2019 and 2020 and was still 4% below 2019 rating averages by 2022.⁴³

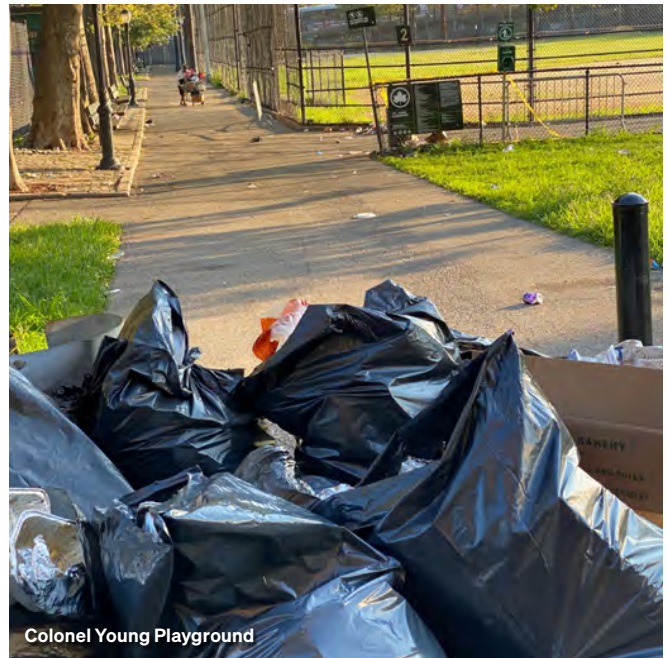
Where We Are Now

As New York City emerges from the Covid crisis, one thing is clear: clean, safe parks are a priority for New Yorkers. This was reflected in the 2022 mayoral race, when all candidates committed to New Yorkers for Parks' call to increase funding for NYC Parks to 1% of the city budget, a pledge Mayor Adams has repeatedly reaffirmed.

The administration made a meaningful step towards that goal in its first budget, adding 715 full time positions. However, in the last year and a half, over 500 existing parks positions were eliminated, and NYC Parks lost over 1,300 federally funded positions. The needle has not moved.

A recent survey from New Yorkers for Parks of parks stewards, advocates and residents revealed some telling results. Among respondents, 84% noted a marked increase in visitation during the peak season, and 70% said they are seeing greater usage outside of the traditional busy season. New Yorkers are using their parks throughout the year.

Maintenance and safety were respondents' top two concerns. Among survey respondents, 53% stated that visitors express safety concerns in their park. The data published in the most recent preliminary Mayoral Management Report



(MMR) mirrors this sentiment. According to the MMR, crimes against persons have increased by 29% and crimes against property have increased by 27% in the first four months of Fiscal Year 2023.⁴⁴

All these concerns point to the need to increase staffing in our parks. From general maintenance workers mowing lawns and taking out trash, to gardeners and tree pruners, to workers ensuring rules are followed and our parks are safe. NYC Parks is not equipped to keep our city's parks safe, clean, and green for New Yorkers.

“We work in pairs, so we always have another person with us. I see myself as an ambassador and spend a lot of time talking with park users about their park. We focus on education and making sure park users understand park rules and why those rules exist. But there are only 450 of us for the entire parks system. There’s no way we can cover that amount of space.”

Parks Enforcement Patrol Officer, NYC Parks



4

Allocating 1% to Our City's Parks: Opportunities and Impacts

Increasing the NYC Parks budget to 1% of the city's annual budget would allow New York City to deliver a fully resourced parks system that better serves New Yorkers and their families while supporting its workforce.

Most critically, NYC Parks could increase its full-time, permanent staff across divisions, enabling the agency to address chronic operating challenges under the currently strained budget.

Achieving 1% of the budget for NYC Parks would enable the agency to:

1.

Optimize parks maintenance for cleaner parks and stronger communities.

2.

Preserve and grow the urban tree canopy and wetlands as refuge and protectors of the city.

3.

Grow programs to directly serve communities.

NYC Parks’ continuous cycle of hiring and training for seasonal staff poses two challenges that could be addressed through increased permanent staff.⁴⁵ First, the agency trains seasonal staff for short term positions, but cannot retain the workers at the end of the season. Trained by NYC Parks, these workers are competitive for other better-paying permanent positions with the city, a missed opportunity to strengthen the agency’s own talent pipeline and retention. Second, despite increased temporary staffing during the peak season (mid-April through mid-October), NYC Parks’ teams are overwhelmed by spikes in visitation during shoulder seasons, demonstrating a need for a larger permanent workforce. With 1%, NYC Parks could better maintain the parks system while providing pathways for seasonal and temporary workers into the permanent workforce.

For NYC Parks and its workers, increased staffing would result in:

- ✔ A 21st Century parks system and agency that meets and exceeds the needs of New Yorkers.
- ✔ An agency that fully takes advantage of **technology to measure, manage and optimize** the stewardship of our city’s parks.
- ✔ An agency that **can cultivate staff growth and retention**, resulting in greater day-to-day efficiency.
- ✔ **Pride among NYC Parks workers** with deeper expertise and stronger ties to the communities they serve.
- ✔ **Improved safety and conditions for workers**, and more support to manage the challenges associated with illegal activity, drug use and homelessness in parks.
- ✔ **Earlier and faster repairs**, avoiding more difficult and expensive capital costs in repairs later.

FY2023 Adopted Budget Staffing and Proposed Permanent Staffing for NYC Parks with 1% of the City Budget

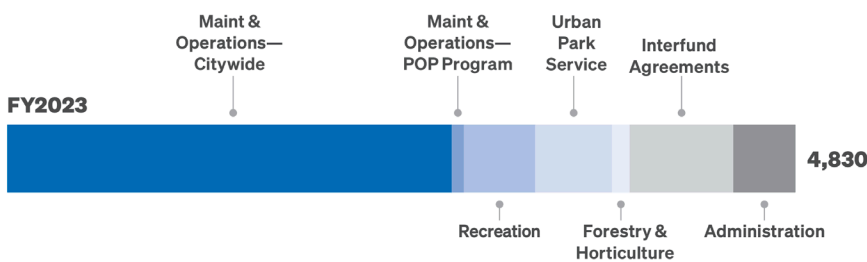
The chart below illustrates the increase to NYC Parks permanent staffing that 1% of the city budget would achieve. This diagram is intended as illustrative and not a proposal for funding allocations.

Maintenance & Operations has 2,720 permanent positions today. With 1%, the agency can hire additional workers to implement a fixed-post, zoned maintenance strategy.

Recreation has 440 permanent positions today. With 1%, the agency can bring additional programming and maintenance to the city’s 36 recreation centers.

Urban Park Service has 470 permanent positions today. 1% would enable hiring more full-time staff, such as Parks Enforcement Patrol officers, to increase NYC Parks presence citywide.

Forestry & Horticulture has 110 permanent positions today. With 1%, NYC Parks can deploy larger teams to protect the urban forest and care for plantings.



Proposed 1% Budget

Approx. 7,825

Optimize Parks Maintenance for Cleaner Parks and Stronger Communities

With 1%, NYC Parks could deploy a more effective maintenance strategy for clean and safe parks while fostering stronger connections with the communities it serves. NYC Parks could institute a zoned maintenance program at all 105 parks greater than 30 acres, assign fixed-post staffing at upwards of 460 parks (nearly one-third of all parks), and employ a second maintenance shift at all appropriate parks. Together, these adjustments would ensure regular maintenance (e.g., cleaning, mowing) and instill a sense of accountability and pride among NYC Parks workers, leading to parks that are reliably cleaner. The consistent, familiar presence of staff would also increase overall safety. With this strategy, residents can expect quicker fixes and stronger connections to NYC Parks employees while the city minimizes expensive capital repairs as a result of regular, attentive maintenance.

“I remember growing up in Brooklyn and our entire community knew the parks worker at our local playground. He knew all of us and our parents and the neighborhood. Kept an eye on the physical space to make sure it was safe and clean...but he also kept an eye on us and was a sort of a mentor for many of the kids in our neighborhood.”

Mitchell Silver, NYC Parks Commissioner, 2014–2021

Impact

For New Yorkers, increasing the full-time maintenance staff would allow NYC Parks to shift to a maintenance strategy that maximizes efficiency and quality of care simultaneously, resulting in:



Clean parks

throughout the year

No overflowing trash bins and litter.

Well-maintained lawns and horticulture.

Clean bathrooms with extended hours.

Well-maintained dog runs and play equipment.



Safe parks

with parks employees developing relationships with the communities they work in.

Parks staffed with familiar workers who work with and become part of the community.

Safe public bathrooms where parents can feel comfortable taking their children.

Parks free of used injection needles.



Quick repairs

avoiding longer closures and ensuring accessibility.

What is Zoned Maintenance? A zoned maintenance model stations fixed-post staff within specified zones of a park. This system allows operations staff to focus their care on a smaller, consistent park area, building deep familiarity with the space's rhythms of use, planting needs, and appropriate cleaning frequency. This system has been shown to increase cleanliness, reliability, and accountability. The presence of regular, fixed-post staff builds community and provides a sense of safety within parks. The model requires resources to support staff at parks throughout their shifts, such as storage, bathrooms, and heat.



An increased maintenance staff would enable NYC Parks to implement a zoned maintenance strategy for all 105 parks over 30 acres. The Central Park Conservancy instituted a zoned maintenance model in 1994, which it credits with improvements due to greater accountability among staff.⁴⁶ This model is widely considered best practice. Today, only three parks in the city-managed system use zoned maintenance: McCarren, Fort Greene, and Crotona Parks. Zoned maintenance allows staff to give more focused, regular attention to their assigned park zone. It also ensures a consistent point of contact to manage volunteers and other staff, improving the efficacy volunteer labor and providing greater supervision of the skilled work that increases engagement and a sense of ownership.

Fixed-post staffing at more than 460 parks would improve maintenance and create stronger relationships between residents and the staff who are present every day. Fixed-post staff take greater pride in their work and identify maintenance issues sooner due to the longer stretches of time spent in the same park, reducing capital repair costs incurred by delayed maintenance. For residents, fixed-post staffing not only provides cleaner, safer parks; but also a consistent NYC Parks presence. Residents are more likely to feel a sense of familiarity among staff who they regularly see. Additional fixed-post staffing would also free up remaining mobile crews to spend more time at sites in other parks that cannot accommodate fixed-post staffing.⁴⁷

“Our staff is faced each month with collecting thousands of used needles. Our staff isn’t trained to manage this situation and there isn’t the cross-agency coordination available to get help to the people who desperately need it and allow us to focus on the job at hand—to make sure our parks are safe, clean and green.”

Lynn Kelly, Executive Director, New York Restoration Project

With increased staffing for operations and maintenance, NYC Parks could establish a second maintenance shift to ensure cleaner and safer parks for more hours of the day. Rather than limiting maintenance to morning and early afternoon, a second shift would ensure parks are maintained through the most intensive hours of use, cleaning and checking park features, stocking comfort stations (public restrooms), and safely disposing of littered syringes and debris. Additionally,

second shifts would allow NYC Parks to keep playgrounds and restrooms open to the public for use later throughout the year, particularly during the peak season when restrooms would remain open until 8 pm or later.



“It’s quite frequent that bathrooms are closed [near the playground], and when they’re open they are not in conditions that I or my child would want to use.”

Regine Polenz, NYC Parent, on the comfort stations near American Playground, Brooklyn



Comfort Station in Harlem River Park

With additional resources and data, NYC Parks could more effectively monitor and evaluate parks. In recent decades, the agency has established standards and practices such as the Park Inspection Program (PIP) to measure and evaluate park performance.⁴⁸ With increased funding, NYC Parks could allocate staff time and new technologies to expand its capacity for data collection, monitoring, and exchange. Additional resources would allow the agency to track park visitation year-round and survey communities, capturing qualitative nuances to create a truly equitable experience across the parks system.



“We see on a daily basis how New Yorkers rely on their parks... and we deal on a daily basis with the aftermath. Our crews regularly are met with piles of trash, bathrooms that are beyond disgusting, litter throughout the parks, bathrooms that look like war zones, and human feces in parks that don’t have bathrooms. And more and more needles and homelessness. Our mobile crews never stop running from place to place their whole shift, rain or shine, freezing or 100 degrees, carrying their own equipment, riding in dilapidated vehicles. We spend half of our time in traffic. The model isn’t working.”

Dilcy Benn, Vice President, District Council 37

The Need

Staff on NYC Parks' mobile maintenance crews travel set routes, stopping to clean parks one to seven times per week. Under this model, it takes an average of 30 to 60 minutes to clean and care for each site.⁴⁹

The time it takes NYC Parks operations staff to commute and readjust to each new landscape could be better spent developing a deep knowledge base about a specific park and forming connections with community members.



Insufficient maintenance of the parks system creates safety concerns and increases future capital requirements. Deferred maintenance results in greater capital costs for major repairs later. The New York City Office of Management and Budget annual Asset Information Management System (AIMS) reports that in Fiscal Year 2022, the city funded 80% of NYC Parks' Recommended Maintenance Need, an estimate of expense funding needed to ensure that infrastructure is in a safe

condition for use.⁵⁰ Years of underfunding these maintenance needs has resulted in a deferred maintenance State of Good Repair Need that totaled \$590 million in Fiscal Year 2022. If operations and maintenance of the parks system continue to be underfunded, these needs can be expected to increase, with growing safety risks and capital costs to the city.

The safety of residents and NYC Parks workers in parks is a growing concern. In interviews, NYC Parks workers and partner organizations cite large numbers of needles and illegal activity in parks today. Interviewees shared stories of harassment, threats and assault while fulfilling their responsibilities. The Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) team are park ambassadors who connect residents to emergency services when needed, provide a sense of security through a uniformed presence within the parks, and enforce basic policies. On any given day, approximately 180 PEP officers are deployed (out of 300 on staff) across more than 1,700 parks citywide.⁵¹ In a 30,000-acre parks system, this means one pair of PEP officers monitors every 333 acres. At current staffing levels, PEP officers are too thinly deployed to have a substantive impact on challenges in parks.

“Increasing spending on parks maintenance can reduce capital costs over time. Timely maintenance to stone walls, building roofs, lawns, etc. would save millions of dollars of work that without regular maintenance, becomes much more expensive as capital repairs and adds to NYC Parks’ already ballooning deferred capital maintenance, estimated at \$600 million.”

Eli Dvorkin, Editorial & Policy Director, Center for an Urban Future

Preserve and Grow the Urban Tree Canopy and Wetlands as Refuge and Protectors of the City

With 1% of the city budget, NYC Parks could better maintain the city's tree canopy, plantings, and wetlands. Additional arborists and foresters would ensure faster response times to tree-related service requests and safer working conditions. NYC Parks could deliver on its collaborative strategies with the Natural Areas Conservancy (NAC) to protect and manage the city's forested natural areas and wetlands, harnessing their many benefits and increasing accessibility. Finally, additional horticulturists would allow gardeners to properly tend to diverse plantings across parks. With these adjustments, NYC Parks can better protect and grow its natural resources and biodiversity throughout the parks system.

NYC Parks' forestry teams could respond to street tree maintenance requests more quickly and effectively.⁵² Street trees filter our air and stormwater, absorb carbon dioxide, and cool our city during extreme heat. NYC Parks' study of the benefits of street trees across the city found a total annual benefit of \$151 million, a benefit-cost ratio of 3.03, from environmental benefits, which doesn't include trees in city parks.⁵³ This calculation accounts for the value of the 57 thousand tons of carbon dioxide sequestered by New York City's street trees, electricity and natural gas cost savings of \$32 per street tree, and the 1,376 gallons of stormwater intercepted by each tree on average each year. Given that a new tree costs \$3,600 to plant as of 2022 and many years to mature and yield environmental benefits, it's crucial to protect existing trees under NYC Parks' jurisdiction. With increased staffing, NYC Parks forestry teams could more quickly and safely respond to tree-related service requests throughout the five boroughs, ultimately protecting New Yorkers from the safety hazards associated with broken branches and dying trees.

Impact

For New Yorkers, increasing the full-time forestry and horticulture staff at NYC Parks would ensure the protection and care of the city's natural areas, tree canopy, and diverse plantings; resulting in:



Comprehensive access to the city's 10,000 acres of natural areas and trails

and the abundant educational and recreational opportunities they provide.



Protected vulnerable wetlands amid a changing climate and expanded public access

to these vital resources.



Cleaner air and relief from the heat

provided by a protected and thriving urban forest.



Faster responses to 311 service requests for trees

and larger, safer teams for the workers addressing them.

Additional full-time forestry staff would expertly monitor and manage New York City’s forested natural areas, protecting a vital resource for climate adaptation and recreation.

In addition to the capital funding large-scale restoration requires, these efforts are essential to protect our 7,300 acres of forested natural areas. With 1%, NYC Parks could deliver on the management framework for forested natural areas developed in partnership with NAC to bring

NYC street trees generate environmental benefits worth over \$151 million annually, including:

- ✔ **57,000 tons of carbon dioxide sequestered**
- ✔ **1,376 gallons of stormwater captured**
- ✔ **50,000 MWh reduction in energy use attributed to the shade and cooling benefits provided**

these to a State of Good Repair. Further, increased funding would allow the agency to deliver on its vision for an improved trail network as outlined in the Strategic Trails Plan for New York City. This would make these spaces more accessible to New Yorkers, particularly along the coasts in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island.

With 1% of the city’s operating budget, NYC Parks could begin to properly manage the wetlands that protect coastal communities from flooding.

Half of New York City’s wetlands and streams are managed by NYC Parks, including 1,540 acres of salt marsh, 450 acres of freshwater wetlands, and 60 miles of streams.⁵⁴ Proper management of these natural areas would ensure wetlands can appropriately capture stormwater runoff at the source to reduce the frequency and volume of contaminated waters flowing into the city’s waterways.⁵⁵ Wetlands provide greater health benefits than traditional greenspace.

Studies show that visual access to water and time spent in urban wetlands may have a greater impact on underserved communities.⁵⁶ With half a million New Yorkers living within walking distance of wetlands in parks, it’s clear that underinvestment has prevented New Yorkers from realizing their benefits. Funding the parks agency at 1% of the city’s operating budget would protect and improve access to wetlands while promoting stewardship of these vital spaces through expanded community engagement programs.

“We cannot imagine our city without the trees that soften the landscape, yet the city is not yet allocating the funding needed to mitigate threats to the urban forest and increase accessibility of natural areas for all New Yorkers to enjoy. Climate change is posing new challenges while also increasing our reliance on our trees as protectors of our city.”

Sarah Charlop-Powers, Executive Director,
Natural Areas Conservancy

The Need

NYC Parks manages approximately 2.5 million trees, 10,000 acres of natural areas, and diverse plantings across another 20,000 acres of landscaped city parks. Small teams and constrained staffing make it difficult for foresters and horticulturists to work safely and effectively and adequately care for the vast portfolio of natural resources in their charge. Forestry teams are stretched to provide the attentive care required to support healthy biodiversity across the parks system. Implementing the best practice strategies and management frameworks developed jointly with forestry experts would require dozens of additional foresters and horticulturists. Instead, understaffing and time constraints mean only the most urgent issues receive attention.

NYC Parks is responsible for half of the street trees across the city. Its lean forestry team has too few foresters to address service requests as quickly as they come in. In interviews, NYC Parks foresters described struggling to safely perform their work while receiving aggressive threats from passersby. The effect of understaffing and insufficient urban forest care is evident in the service requests received. In Fiscal Year 2022, time of first action targets for tree-related service requests (a metric requiring the request to be acknowledged but not resolved) were inconsistently met, ranging from as low as 14% and peaking at just 78%.⁵⁷ The result is an exhausted workforce motivated to seek attractive positions in other agencies with stronger protections and support.

Compared to peer cities, NYC Parks has limited horticulturists to manage plantings across 20,000 acres of landscaped parks. When accounting for part-time and temporary workers, this amounts to effectively one gardener for every 114 acres (based on 20,000 acres of landscaped parks within the 30,000 acre parks system). By comparison, Chicago and San Francisco each have one gardener assigned to every 18 acres of parkland.^{58, 59} These horticulturists are essential to ensuring healthy biodiversity in the city’s greenspaces.

Acres per horticulturist at parks departments in New York City, Chicago, and San Francisco.

City Park System or Park	Acres per Horticulturist
New York City	114
Chicago ⁶⁰	18
San Francisco ⁶¹	18





their trails are less accessible to New Yorkers, particularly in the coastal areas of outer boroughs, which are otherwise underserved by landscaped parks.

The city’s wetlands play an important role in supporting climate resilience. But they are at risk from invasive species, toxic run-off, erosion, and sea level rise.⁶⁴ As of 2021, around half of all streams, salt marshes, and freshwater

wetlands assessed in the Wetlands Management Framework for New York City were found to be in poor ecosystem health or facing ongoing threat to future health.⁶⁵ Recent assessments found that salt marshes managed by NYC Parks are on a trajectory of losing several acres per year with the erosion of vegetated marsh. Freshwater wetlands are similarly at risk from development, invasive species, stormwater pollution, and loss of connection to water sources.⁶⁶

NYC Parks’ understaffed forestry division leaves our forested natural areas susceptible to threats posed by development, invasive species, and a changing climate.

As of 2018, 57% of the city’s forested natural areas had invasive vines in canopy trees.⁶² A recent assessment found 42% of natural areas managed by NYC Parks to be under medium to high threat from urban challenges, increased prevalence of invasive species, and climate change impacts.⁶³ Only 16% of these areas were under very low threat. Without sufficient maintenance and signage, natural areas and



“We are such a committed team and we so desperately want to do our work to ensure our parks and natural areas are well maintained, with indigenous and healthy plants that would make our parks such a complete part of the experience for New Yorkers. But we have so few gardeners there’s no time for training and we’re running from one park to the next just hoping things don’t get worse.”

Daniel Clay, President of Gardeners Local 1507, NYC Parks

Grow Programs to Directly Serve Communities

Additional expense funding would enable NYC Parks to increase funding for education, recreation, and social programs, which are free to 2.4 million New Yorkers aged 24 and younger.⁶⁷ Whether through exercise classes at recreation centers, free concerts at parks in the summer, or Urban Park Ranger lessons in forested natural areas, NYC Parks' programming connects community members within their neighborhoods and to the natural world.

Increased funding would allow NYC Parks and its partners to expand programming citywide. This would enable expansion of successful programs like the Urban Park Rangers, Kids in Motion, and Summer Sports Experience programs. Together, these programs help New Yorkers connect with and feel safe in their park, building comfort in the natural environment and providing associated mental and physical health benefits. With additional funding, NYC Parks could invest more deeply in collaborations with groups like City Parks Foundation, which oversees Partnerships for Parks, to provide local programming and build community. Further, with an improved maintenance strategy ensuring better care across the system, community organizations could focus volunteer resources on programming, allowing more community-driven activation of neighborhood parks citywide.

In addition to improving programming in parks, reversing decades of disinvestment would revitalize the city's recreation centers. With additional funding, NYC Parks could increase staffing at its 36 recreation centers and 10 nature centers. This would give the agency the capacity to expand programming, extend hours, and address operational and maintenance issues more efficiently. Since recreation centers are given latitude to develop programs, individual centers can use funding to introduce and shift programs to best serve community members. Additional staffing would allow centers to recognize and adapt to resident interests, providing programming catered to the neighborhoods that they serve.

Impact

For New Yorkers, greater expense funding for programs and recreation, coupled with maintenance improvements, would grow the offering of free programs citywide, resulting in:



New Yorkers of all ages enjoying free cultural and recreational programs

across our entire parks system.



Free, exciting programs for children at the city's recreation centers,

in more active and better maintained spaces to teach, entertain, and play.



Opportunities for the broad network of **volunteers to expand programming in their community parks.**

The Need

Funding deficits limit NYC Parks’ ability to provide and support quality public programming in parks and recreation centers.

NYC Parks has limited reach due to too few programmatic staff. For example, the Urban Park Rangers, who educate New Yorkers and connect them to the natural world, is constrained to 100 rangers as of 2022. Park facilities—recreation centers, nature centers, and field houses—are underutilized today with limited programs and hours of operation available to community members who may otherwise benefit.

The agency depends on community groups donating their time and financial resources to fill gaps in the current maintenance system.

An array of community-based organizations manages volunteers and fundraises to ensure individual parks receive adequate care and serve local need. Partnerships for Parks, an organization supported with both private and public funding supports 450 of these community led groups by providing training, grants, staff capacity, and organizing volunteers. Interviews with these organizations emphasized that financial resources and volunteer hours are spent compensating for the inadequacies of NYC Parks’ mobile maintenance strategy. Rather than investing resources on long-term engagement and community-driven programming initiatives, they’re focused on basic upkeep to augment care across the parks system.

Interviews with these organizations emphasized that financial resources and volunteer hours are spent compensating for the inadequacies of NYC Parks’ mobile maintenance strategy. Rather than investing resources on long-term engagement and community-driven programming initiatives, they’re focused on basic upkeep to augment care across the parks system.

Recreation centers have endured decades of deferred maintenance and reduced programming due to continuous budget cuts.

NYC Parks’ expense allocation to recreation centers declined by 40% from \$56 million (in 2022 dollars) in 1978 to \$34 million in 2022. Over the same period, the city’s population grew by 14% (one million residents).



“More maintenance funding would free us up to do more outreach to kids in the schools.”

Fay Hill, President, Volunteers for Springfield Park



“[Park] programming helps people feel like their neighborhood isn’t a place they need to leave if they want to experience culture and art. It connects residents to the place on a different level when people get involved with painting murals or planting trees and flowers. [When I go to other parks] sometimes I don’t feel welcome there. People might have a higher median income than me, and I can feel the disparity. I visit and it’s kind of like ‘look at all this [programming] going on here, why don’t I have that in my park?’”

Ed Mundo, Bronx Resident

As a result of these budget cuts, the number of full-time budgeted staff for recreation centers dropped from 760 in 1978 to 438 in Fiscal Year 2023.⁶⁸ This limited pool of funding has led to major gaps in services and unmet programming potential.

A limited budget has led to delays in maintenance and disruptions to community services. In the 2022 NYC Speaks survey, when asked what public infrastructure investments residents would like to see in their neighborhoods, “high-quality recreation centers with enrichment programs” was the most common response with 35% of respondents.⁶⁹

Across these facilities, heat and hot water may go out of service for extended periods and equipment is often inoperable. Spaces may also be repurposed, such as the exercise room at the Red Hook Recreation Center used as a temporary changing facility during pool hours. As a result of unmet maintenance needs, recreation center members experience frequent stops and starts to regular programming. Staff make the most of their capacity and

develop programming in partnership with community organizations. However, as staffing shrinks, the recreation centers must resort to an open-door operating model, which provides access to gyms with reduced programming.



“The lack of investment in our recreation center has left so much on the table. We’re trying to squeak by to make this center simply function, when the potential for this center, in this neighborhood, could be limitless. We should be a hub of recreation and civic activity. A center for our community to gather for recreation but also families to focus on civic and community challenges and opportunities.”

Marlene Pantin, Executive Director, Red Hook Conservancy

Table: Impacts and Metrics

Optimize Parks Maintenance for Cleaner Parks and Stronger Communities

Impacts	Baseline <i>(All metrics are based on Fiscal Year 2022 unless otherwise noted)</i>	Target
Clean parks throughout the year	86% of parks were in overall acceptable condition. ⁷⁰	93% of Parks are in overall acceptable condition.
Safe parks with parks employees developing relationships with the communities they work in	592 Major felonies were reported on Parks’ properties and 24,511 summons were issued. ⁷¹ Parks have seen an 29% increase in crimes against persons and an 27% increase in crime against property. ⁷² <i>Note: NYC Parks is not responsible for the protection of park areas from felony crime.</i>	Reduce the number of violations through education and targeted enforcement.
Quick repairs avoiding longer closures and ensuring accessibility	State of Good Repair Need totaled \$590 million. ⁷³	Reduce the State of Good Repair backlog by 50% over ten years.

Preserve and Grow the Urban Forest as Refuge and Protector of the City

Impacts	Baseline <i>(All metrics are based on Fiscal Year 2022 unless otherwise noted)</i>	Target
Comprehensive access to the city’s 10,000 acres of natural areas and trails and the abundant educational and recreational opportunities they provide.	42 out of 350 miles of formal and informal nature trails feature official trail markers as of March 2020. ⁷⁴	300 miles of formalized, well-managed and clearly marked trails mapped on Parks and public websites, with volunteers caring for 200 miles of trails per year.
Protected vulnerable wetlands amid a changing climate and expanded public access to these vital resources.	<p>Invasive species were found in 85% of forested natural areas and invasive vines climbed trees in 57% of forest plots as of 2018.⁷⁵</p> <p>As of 2021, around half of all streams, salt marshes, and freshwater wetlands assessed in the Wetlands Management Framework for New York City were found to be in poor ecosystem health or facing ongoing threat to future health.⁷⁶</p>	<p>Reduce the invasive species proportion in forested natural areas to below 10% of forest plots.</p> <p>Annually restore 60 acres of natural areas, care for 1,500 acres with in-house staff and volunteers, install tens of thousands of diverse native plants and maintain dozens of stormwater green infrastructure installations each year.</p>
Cleaner air and relief from the heat provided by a protected and thriving urban forest.	32,468 trees planted.	Plant 25K trees per year. One for one replacement of all risk-related tree removals and storm losses within two years.
Faster responses to 311 service requests for trees and larger, safer teams for the workers addressing them.	<p>184,449 trees were inspected in FY2022.⁷⁷</p> <p>Between 14% to 78% of tree-related 311 service requests were addressed within the target timeframe for first action.⁷⁸</p>	95% on-time review of building plan and permits to ensure appropriate tree preservation.

Grow programs to directly serve communities

Impacts	Baseline	Target
<i>(All metrics are based on Fiscal Year 2022 unless otherwise noted)</i>		
New Yorkers of all ages enjoying free cultural and recreational programs across our entire parks system.	385,140 attendees of non-recreation center programs. ⁷⁹	650,000 or more attendees of non-recreation center programs.
Free, exciting programs for children at the city's recreation centers , in more active and better maintained spaces to teach, entertain, and play.	100,385 recreation center members and 776,001 total attendees. ⁸⁰	200,000 or more recreation center members and over 1.5 million annual attendees.
Opportunities for the broad network of parks volunteers to expand programming in their community parks .	42,413 volunteers with NYC Parks and 485 community partner groups.	Double the number of community groups and volunteers supported.

Agency and Workforce Impacts

A 21st Century parks system and **agency that meets and exceeds the needs of New Yorkers**.

An agency that fully takes advantage of **technology to measure, manage and optimize** the stewardship of our city's parks.

An agency that can **cultivate staff growth and retention**, resulting in greater day-to-day efficiency.

Pride among NYC Parks workers with deeper expertise and stronger ties to the communities they serve.

Improved safety and conditions for workers, and more support to manage the challenges associated with illegal activity, drug use and homelessness in parks.

Earlier and faster repairs, avoiding more difficult and expensive capital costs in later.



A New Age for NYC Parks and New Yorkers

New York City's park system is essential to the social, environmental, and economic health and vitality of the city and deserves funding that reflects its significance.

Allocating 1% to the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation is an opportunity to realize a fully resourced agency that can grow and support its workforce while providing more reliability and effectively maintaining and activating New York City parks to better serve New Yorkers.

With 1% for NYC Parks, neighborhood parks will be cleaner and more inviting. Residents will get to know and appreciate the familiar faces of NYC Parks workers who look after the same park daily.

These workers will not only bring a predictability to residents visiting parks, they'll deepen their expertise and build connections between the agency and the community it serves.

NYC Parks workers will feel safer and better supported performing their work, whether opening and closing parks, trimming dying branches from trees, or tending to the diversity of plantings.

With 1% for NYC Parks, both residents and NYC Parks workers will find a sense of pride in a healthier, more beautiful, cleaner, and safer parks system.

Appendix

NYC Parks Permanent Workforce by Division in FY 2023

Maintenance and Operations— Citywide: 2,724

Clean parks, maintain plants and trees, and repair amenities and buildings.

Maintenance and Operations— POP: 74

Manage the Parks Opportunity Program (POP), a workforce development initiative which provides skills training to applicable candidates for six-month durations.

Recreation: 438

Operate recreation centers and center-based and park-based programs, including: sports, fitness, arts, technology, and cultural recreation programs for all ages and abilities.

Urban Park Service (UPS): 470

Includes the Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP), Central Communications, and Parks Emergency Management teams.

Forestry and Horticulture— General: 109

Manage citywide forestry programs, including reporting, policy development, permits and plan review, and trees and sidewalks as well as providing support for Maintenance and Operations' horticulture staff.

Interfund Agreements (IFA): 635

Manage or support the design, procurement, and construction of capital projects.

Administration: 380

Provide the resources and supportive services needed for agency operations and workforce, including hiring, budgeting, payroll, training, procurement, legal, and compliance.

Glossary

Comfort Stations

Public restrooms for park visitors.

Fixed-Post

A maintenance strategy that allows for workers to work in an individual park location rather than travel to other locations (mobile crews).

Interfund Agreements

An internal contract that allows the Capital Fund to reimburse the General Fund (Expense Budget) for the cost of city employees who work on capital projects.

Maintenance and Operations

The function, duties and labor associated with the daily operations and normal repairs, replacement of parts and structural components, and other activities needed to preserve an asset so that it continues to provide acceptable services and achieves its expected life.

Maintenance Model/ Maintenance Strategy

The overall strategy NYC Parks uses to perform parks operations and maintenance. These include fixed-post strategies, mobile crew strategies, and zoned maintenance strategies.

Mobile Crews

Teams of NYC Parks staff driving from park to park to perform maintenance duties.

Natural Areas

A site (terrestrial or aquatic) of special biodiversity significance due to the presence of rare species, unique natural communities, important animal populations, or other ecological features.

Operating Budget

Funds dedicated to the daily maintenance and operations of NYC Parks and other agencies.

Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP)

Uniformed officers who educate the public of proper use and enforce rules and regulations at beaches, recreation centers, marinas, and parks.

Park Inspection Program

A performance measurement system that generates inspections of parks and playgrounds administered by the Operations and Management Planning (OMP) division.

Parks Opportunity Program (POP)

A hiring program that employs and trains applicants referred by the Department of Social Services to clean and green our parks, playgrounds, and other facilities citywide.

Park Volunteers

Community groups and/or non-profits that maintain and program their local park.

Permanent Workforce

Staff employed by NYC Parks year-round (as opposed to part time or seasonal staff).

Programming

Recreational, cultural, educational, and health-oriented activities and events open to the public.

Recreation Centers

An NYC Parks building or structure which provides recreational programming and other community activities.

Seasonal Staff

NYC Parks staff employed for six months or less.

State of Good Repair

The capitably eligible investment estimated to be required to ensure infrastructure is in a safe condition for use.

Street Trees

A tree planted in the sidewalk or a planting strip in the public right-of-way.

Tree Canopy

The part of a city that is shaded by trees, formed by mature tree crowns.

Wetlands

Areas saturated by surface or ground water sufficient to support the distinctive vegetation adapted for live in saturated soil conditions, including swamps, marshes, bogs, and streams.

Zoned Maintenance

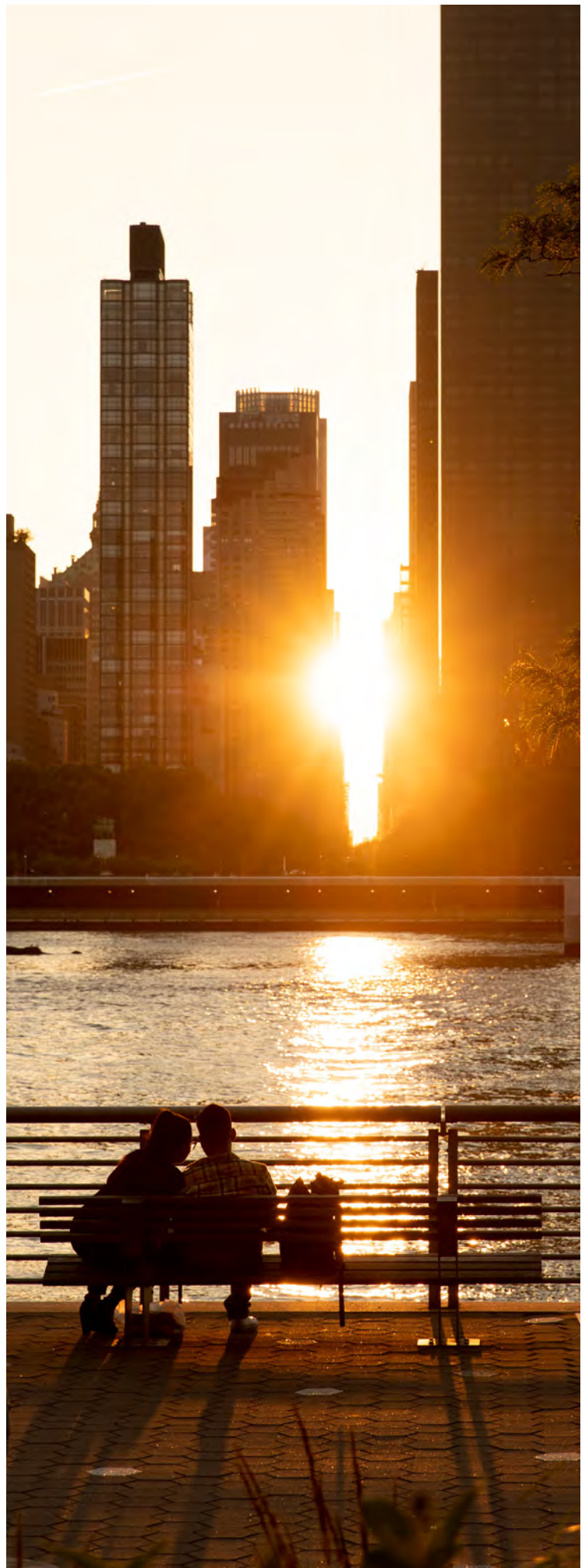
A parks maintenance model that stations fixed-post staff within specified zones, allowing operations staff to focus their care on a smaller, consistent park area, building deep familiarity with the space's rhythms of use, planting needs, and appropriate cleaning frequency.



Endnotes

1. Patrick Arden. 2010. Issue 27 Preview: The High Cost of Free Parks. *Next City*.
2. Center for an Urban Future. 2018. A New Leaf. Center for an Urban Future.
3. HR&A Analysis of the Trust for Public Land's 2022 City Park Facts.
4. See Glossary for "State of Good Repair" definition.
5. See Glossary for "Operating Budget" definition.
6. Adams, Eric [@ericadamsfornyc]. "Dedicating just 1% of the city budget to parks would bring us closer to the more generous—and forward-thinking—funding levels of decades past." I couldn't agree more, which is why I've proudly committed to a 'percent for parks' plan!" *Twitter*. Sept. 29, 2021. <https://twitter.com/ericadamsfornyc/status/1443363990835433476?s=20&t=rXflzmmTM1U4sCDktsXMjw>
7. Jennings, Viniece and Omoshalewa Bamkole. 2019. The Relationship between Social Cohesion and Urban Green Space: An Avenue for Health Promotion. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.
8. The Trust for Public Land. 2022. The Economic Benefits of Parks in New York City. *The Trust for Public Land*.
9. Burrowes, Kimberly, Mychal Cohen and Peace Gwam. February 2022. The Health Benefits of Parks and their Economic Impacts, *Urban Land Institute*.
10. Mueller JT, Park SY, Mowen AJ. The Relationship Between Parks and Recreation per Capita Spending and Mortality from 1980 to 2010: A Fixed Effects Model. *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 14, 100827.
11. Burrowes, Kimberly, Mychal Cohen and Peace Gwam. February 2022. The Health Benefits of Parks and their Economic Impacts, *Urban Land Institute*.
12. 2022 New York City Heat-Related Mortality Report. *New York City Health Department*.
13. Using Trees and Vegetation to Reduce Heat Islands, *Environmental Protection Agency*.
14. The Trust for Public Land. 2022. The Economic Benefits of Parks in New York City. *The Trust for Public Land*.
15. City of New York. 2014. PlaNYC: Parks, NYC Special Initiative for Rebuilding and Resiliency.
16. New York City Tree Map. *NYC Parks*.
17. Treglia, M.L., Acosta-Morel, M., Crabtree, D., Galbo, K., Lin-Moges, T., Van Slooten, A., and Maxwell, E.N. 2021. The State of the Urban Forest in New York City. *The Nature Conservancy*.
18. Provided by NYC Parks.
19. The Trust for Public Land. 2022. The Economic Benefits of Parks in New York City. *The Trust for Public Land*.
20. The Trust for Public Land. 2022. The Economic Benefits of Parks in New York City. *The Trust for Public Land*.
21. It is important to acknowledge that while increased property values are a benefit for property owners who can afford increased taxes, it increases the risk of gentrification and displacement for renters and lower-income households.
22. NYC Parks' capital budget is separate and exclusively used to fund infrastructure and improvements that the city considers capitolly eligible such as the development of new parks.
23. Patrick Arden. 2010. Issue 27 Preview: The High Cost of Free Parks. *Next City*.
24. Center for an Urban Future. 2018. A New Leaf. Center for an Urban Future. Center for an Urban Future analysis of New York City's Modified Expense Budgets, 1970–1979, accessed from the Municipal Library
25. HR&A Analysis of the Trust for Public Land's 2022 City Park Facts.
26. HR&A analysis of The Trust for Public Land's 2022 City Park Facts. This analysis focused on park space managed and funded by local parks departments, excluding national or privately managed and funded parkland. NYC Parks operating funding reflects direct operating funds allocated by the city in the Fiscal Year 2023 adopted budget. It does not include private maintenance and operations funding raised and managed by conservancies, a unique model that primarily resources a very limited number of parks and cannot be replicated citywide.
27. Pitas, Nicholas, Ph.D., Austin Barrett, Ph.D., Andrew Mowen, Ph.D., and Kevin Roth, Ph.D. 2018. "The Great Recession's Profound Impact on Parks and Recreation." *National Recreation and Park Association*.
28. NYC Independent Budget Office analysis of Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports. Dollars are adjusted for inflation to 2022.
29. NYC Independent Budget Office analysis of Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports. Dollars are adjusted for inflation to 2022.
30. See Glossary for "Parks Volunteers" definition.
31. Center for an Urban Future, A New Leaf, 2018; and NYC Parks. Data on seasonal staffing was not available for Fiscal Years 1987 and 1997.
32. Fiscal Year 2023 Adopted Budget. New York City Office of Management and Budget.
33. Full-time equivalent (FTE) employee is a measurement of personnel in terms of full-time labor capability. For example, two employees who work half-time are equivalent to 1.0 FTE.
34. See Glossary for "Permanent Workforce" definition.
35. Center for an Urban Future, A New Leaf, 2018; and NYC Parks. Data on seasonal staffing was not available for Fiscal Years 1987 and 1997.
36. Provided by NYC Parks.
37. See Appendix for full definitions of Permanent Workforce by Division.
38. NYC Parks assigns each park a Service Level Agreement (SLA) based on size, visitation, intensity of usage, plantings, trees, seasonal fluctuations and more. The SLA determines how frequently a park must be visited and cleaned, which ranges from one to seven visits per week. Fiscal Year 2021 Annual Report on Parks Maintenance. *NYC Parks*.
39. Maslin Nir, Sarah. Aug. 27, 2020. "Trash Piles Up in Parks, Just When New Yorkers Need Them the Most," *The New York Times*.
40. Parks Inspection Program. *NYC Parks*.
41. Cruz, David. Aug. 29, 2020. "With Trash Complaints Up 120% At Parks This Summer, City Launches Campaign To Tackle Garbage Uptick." *Gothamist*.
42. Maslin Nir, Sarah. Aug. 27, 2020. "Trash Piles Up in Parks, Just When New Yorkers Need Them the Most," *The New York Times*.
43. Parks Inspection Program. *NYC Parks*.
44. Mayor's Preliminary Management Report January 2023. New York City Mayor's Office of Operations.
45. See Glossary for "Seasonal Staff" definition.
46. Project for Public Spaces. Dec. 31, 2008. "Zone Gardening: A Report from Central Park." *Project for Public Spaces*.
47. Fixed-post staffing requires a physical facility with a restroom and heating or heat pumps.
48. See Glossary for "Park Inspection Program (PIP)" definition.
49. Information provided by NYC Parks in interviews.
50. FY 2022 Agency Asset Information Management System (AIMS) Report. New York City Office of Management and Budget.
51. Provided by NYC Parks.
52. See Glossary for "Forestry" definition.
53. Tree Benefits. *NYC Parks*.
54. Wetlands Management Framework for New York City. *Natural Areas Conservancy*, New York, NY.
55. Wetlands Management Framework for New York City. *Natural Areas Conservancy*, New York, NY.
56. Wetlands Management Framework for New York City. *Natural Areas Conservancy*, New York, NY.
57. Mayor's Management Report 2022. New York City Mayor's Office of Operations.
58. Center for an Urban Future. 2018. A New Leaf. *Center for an Urban Future*.
59. 2021 Budget Appropriations. Chicago Park District.
60. 2021 Budget Appropriations. Chicago Park District.
61. Center for an Urban Future. 2018. A New Leaf. *Center for an Urban Future*.

62. Pregitzer, Clara C., Helen M. Forgione, Kristen L. King, Sarah Charlop-Powers, and Jennifer Greenfeld. 2018. Forest Management Framework for New York City. *Natural Areas Conservancy*, New York, NY.
63. Pregitzer, Clara C., Helen M. Forgione, Kristen L. King, Sarah Charlop-Powers, and Jennifer Greenfeld. 2018. Forest Management Framework for New York City. *Natural Areas Conservancy*, New York, NY.
64. Wetlands Management Framework for New York City. *Natural Areas Conservancy*, New York, NY.
65. Wetlands Management Framework for New York City. *Natural Areas Conservancy*, New York, NY.
66. Wetlands Management Framework for New York City. *Natural Areas Conservancy*, New York, NY.
67. 2022. Lightcast.
68. Williams, Timothy. July 9, 2007. "Difficult Choices for the Old Rec Center." *The New York Times*.
69. 2022. NYC Speaks Dashboard.
70. Mayor's Management Report 2022. New York City Mayor's Office of Operations.
71. Mayor's Management Report 2022. New York City Mayor's Office of Operations.
72. Mayor's Preliminary Management Report January 2023. New York City Mayor's Office of Operations.
73. FY 2022 Agency Asset Information Management System (AIMS) Report. New York City Office of Management and Budget.
74. 2021. Forest Management Framework for New York City. *Natural Areas Conservancy*, New York, NY.
75. Pregitzer, Clara C., Helen M. Forgione, Kristen L. King, Sarah Charlop-Powers, and Jennifer Greenfeld. 2018. Forest Management Framework for New York City. *Natural Areas Conservancy*, New York, NY.
76. Wetlands Management Framework for New York City. *Natural Areas Conservancy*, New York, NY.
77. Mayor's Management Report 2022. New York City Mayor's Office of Operations.
78. Mayor's Management Report 2022. New York City Mayor's Office of Operations.
79. Mayor's Management Report 2022. **New York City Mayor's Office of Operations.**
80. Mayor's Management Report 2022. New York City Mayor's Office of Operations.





NEW YORKERS
FOR PARKS

New Yorkers for Parks
The Arthur Ross Center for Parks and Open Spaces
55 Broad Street, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10004

www.ny4p.org