



*A Coalition of Civic, Greening, Recreation and Economic Development Groups*

**City Council Parks committee  
Hearing on resolution 693**

**New Yorkers for Parks Testimony  
April 2, 2003**

**Introduction**

My name is Allison Farina and I am the Director of Government and Community Affairs at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). I am here today to urge your support of Resolution 693, which calls upon the city to evaluate the safety of our parks and open spaces. First, I would like to thank Chairman Addabbo for scheduling this hearing and for participating in NY4P's January 13 press conference on this issue.

**Overview**

In the wake of four brutal attacks on women in NYC parkland between October 2002 and January 2003, Resolution 693 calls for the implementation of new strategies to address crime in parks. The resolution creates a mandate for the city to analyze the Department of Park & Recreation's (DPR) Park Enforcement Patrol (PEP) program, and suggests a higher level of interagency collaboration between the DPR and the NYPD, by tracking and mapping crime in parks through NYPD's COMPSTAT. The passage of this resolution will ensure a safer environment for park users and increase the effectiveness of the DPR's park patrol.

The high-profile parks in Manhattan, including Bryant, Central, Battery, and Madison Square, have a dedicated security / police presence that protects park users and public property. As a result, these parks are some of the safest in the country. However, neighborhood parks at other Manhattan locations and in other boroughs have no dedicated security / police force. In fact, there are only 112 PEP officers to patrol the more than 28,000 acres of city parkland, amounting to one officer for every 250 park acres. Thorough tracking and mapping of crime in all NYC parks will ensure that every park in every neighborhood has the enforcement patrol needed for its community.

**National Comparisons**

NY4P has performed extensive research into park safety programs nationwide and found that initiatives in Houston and LA provide excellent examples for NYC on how to increase park safety.

**Houston**

The Houston Police Department tracks crimes by type and location. When a crime is committed in a park, Houston Police track the crime and classify the incident by location, noting if the crime occurred in a Park & Recreation Area, Zoo or Swimming Pool. Such categorizing assists in tracking specific types of crime in parks and provides useful information for deterrence strategies.

## Los Angeles

### *Safe Parks Program*

Los Angeles provides another example of interagency collaboration between the Police and Parks departments, as well as an example of community input and public accountability. Since September 1997, the LAPD has placed an increased emphasis on park safety through the "Safe Parks" Program. Neighborhood parks in high crime areas are targeted for increased patrols as well as physical and programmatic upgrades. Park Rangers and LAPD officers have linked their databases and also hold regular joint meetings to target crime in parks.

Moreover, the LAPD has brought citizens into the process through a "Safe Parks Community Survey" program that is accessible via their website and enables anyone to register their opinions and concerns about safety in neighborhood parks.

## Conclusion

NY4P makes the following recommendations:

1. **Track and map crime in all parks.** At a recent hearing, the DPR announced that it could integrate Geographical Information System (GIS) data into their available information classification systems. With this technology, tracking and mapping crime in parks could be as simple as adding a "Parks" box for the NYPD to check off on a crime report.
2. **Grow the Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP)** into a farther-reaching security force. Better-trained and more numerous PEP officers should serve as guides and experts to police officers on location in larger parks, as rangers do in State and National parks. There are currently only 112 PEP officers throughout the five boroughs, most of whom do not work past 3pm.
3. If an increase in crime is shown after tracking and mapping crime and increasing the number of PEP officers, the city should seriously consider **the establishment of a Parks Division within the Police Department.** Similar consolidations have been made regarding our schools and subways, resulting in a marked decrease in criminal activity.

**Finally, the NYPD and DPR must collaborate to ensure that, regardless of the city's fiscal situation, New York City's parks and recreation spaces will not slide back to the conditions of the 1970's – dilapidated and unsafe.** Clean and well programmed parks help prevent crime. When parks are well patrolled and well maintained, more people use them, making them safer and more accessible. Positive activities deter drug dealing, graffiti and illicit behavior. In short, good parks make safe neighborhoods.

Thank you.