



**New York City Council Committees on Finance
Hearing on the FY15 Final Budget
June 6, 2014
Submitted testimony of New Yorkers for Parks**

This budget season has overwhelmingly, and encouragingly, focused on addressing equity issues across the city's park system. It has been a constructive dialogue that has drawn the attention not only of the Council and City Hall, but also of the media and park advocates across the city. Now, it's time to make sure all that talk about a better parks budget actually helps deliver one.

What are the needs? First and foremost, more full-time maintenance workers and gardeners in parks most in need. To achieve that, we call on the Council and administration to fully support Parks Committee Chairman Mark Levine's proposal to increase the Parks Department's expense budget by **\$27 million**, which would give Commissioner Silver the ability to start strategically directing resources toward high-need areas with a clear goal: deliver quick, tangible results for park users. Additionally, the \$27 million would fund a batch of new Parks Enforcement Patrol officers, who play an important role in enforcing Parks Department rules and addressing quality of life issues in parks. **There is simply no budgetary action more critical to helping the de Blasio administration effectively address park equity issues than adding that \$27 million into the FY 15 budget.** And it should be baselined into the budget to ensure that the added staff positions and PEP officers are full-time and long-term. We are hopeful that the momentum in the Council and among park advocates behind that requested increase – as well as recent comments from City Hall that the Parks Department could use more funding – now translates into action at the negotiating table.

We were dismayed to hear at the Council's February 25 hearing on tree care that while the Parks Department has, thanks to recent budget restorations, shortened its street-tree pruning cycle, it still prunes very few park trees. And while \$2 million was added and baselined in FY14 for stump removal, there is still a huge backlog of stumps – particularly after Hurricane Sandy and the recent treacherous winter. We'd like to see **\$3 million** added for park tree care and stump removal so that the Parks Department can prune at least 25,000 trees in parks and remove approximately 4,000 more stumps. This work will be needed annually, so the \$3 million should be baselined in the budget.

There is momentum on the capital budget front, too: the FY15 executive budget includes a large infusion of capital money to be spent at the discretion of Commissioner Silver, including roughly \$80 million earmarked for "neighborhood parks." This is a critical step in the right direction. We're also encouraged to see that the Council is supporting a Parks Department request for much-needed capital division staff – 55 new positions – to help DPR both clear its capital backlog caused by Sandy recovery projects and to more efficiently take on the new neighborhood parks projects. Without an addition of **\$4 million** for those positions, those neighborhood parks projects simply wouldn't have the manpower in place to get them planned, designed and built in a timely manner. Like the potential new maintenance, gardening and PEP positions that would be covered by the \$27

million increase, these capital positions should be baselined in the budget to ensure that the capital division is properly staffed for the long haul.

As we've said many times over the past year, there are two essential ways to address equity issues: First, significantly increase the Parks Department's maintenance budget in a way that ensures the addition of more full-time maintenance positions. Those additions would allow the Department to more effectively plan for the long-term. Second, give the Department more control over how capital dollars are spent. With the \$80 million allocated for discretionary finding for "neighborhood parks" and, potentially, the \$27 million increase in DPR's maintenance and operations funding, the FY15 budget may well take a significant step toward meeting those benchmarks.

Summary of requested additions to FY15 executive budget: **\$34 million**

- **\$27 million** added and baselined for new full-time maintenance, gardening, and PEP positions
- **\$4 million** added and baselined for 55 new full-time Capital Division jobs
- **\$3 million** added and baselined for park-tree pruning and stump removal

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