



Chairperson, Martha Taylor

*The City of New York
Borough of Queens*

Community Board 8

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District Manager, Marie Adam-Ovide

Parks Committee Meeting: New Yorkers for Parks
Date: Tuesday January 9, 2024
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Place: **In-Person**

Bhitihara Martha Fulton, Parks Committee Chair

Board Members: Wendy Gennaro, Ahsan Habib

Also, in attendance: James Gallagher Jr., CB8 Member, Mrs. Yolanda Gallagher, DM Marie Adam-Ovide and Nettie V. Norris, CB8 Staff Member

Chairperson Bhitihara Fulton called the meeting to order at 7:45 p.m. She welcomed all attendees and asked that they introduce themselves.

Chairperson Bhitihara Fulton asked Ms. Sherrise Palomino, Director of Advocacy and Programs, to begin the presentation to the Parks Committee. A presentation deck was handed out.

Ms. Palomino started out with an overview of the organization.

We are the only independent citywide organization that advocates for quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers. New Yorkers for Parks was established over 100 years ago, championed equitable development, distribution, and maintenance of open spaces across NYC. **How we work:**

Partnerships/Advocacy/Research.

The Play Fair Coalition:

Play Fair comprises 400+ groups and organizations elevating NYC parks issues, identifying comprehensive citywide solutions, and advocating for increased funds for NYC parks.

Our co-founders are New Yorkers for Parks, New York League of Conservation Voters, and DC 37 Parks Workers Union. We are currently supported by New York City Council Parks Committee Chair Shekar Krishnan.

These are some of the highlights of the New Yorkers for Parks’ presentation.

Current State of Parks – (Source: January 2023 Preliminary Mayor’s Management Report)

- 85% of Parks Stewards recorded an increase in usership in the last 3 years.
- 70% of Parks Stewards recorded an increase in usership outside of the traditional busy season (May-August).
- 53% of Parks Stewards said visitors express safety concerns about their park.

- 29% increase in crimes against persons in the first 4 months of FY 23*.
- 27% increase in crimes against property in first 4 months of FY 23*.
- NYC Parks have 1 Gardener for every 114 acres.
- San Francisco and Chicago have 1 Gardener for every 18 acres.

What 1% would mean for NYC:

- A 21st Century parks system that meets New Yorkers’ needs.
- Clean and well-maintained parks throughout the year.
- Safe parks with staff building relationships with community members.
- Quick repairs, avoiding longer closures and ensuring accessibility.
- Comprehensive access to 10,000 acres of natural areas and trails.

What 1% would mean for NYC:

- Protected vulnerable wetlands (Jamaica Bay) amid a changing climate.
- Cleaner air and heat relief provided by a protected urban forest.
- Faster responses to 311 service requests for trees.
- Free cultural and recreational programs for New Yorkers of all ages.
- Improved safety and conditions for workers.
- Improved infrastructure.

Mayor Adams is in support of 1% along with 44 Council Members.

Question: Wendy Gennaro – I work for an organization that services people with disabilities. So, I’m curious to know, are there any groups on this list that represent the interest of people with disabilities?

Answer: Ms. Palomino – Not specifically and that is something we are advocating for as well. We have plans to make sure that navigating the parks is easily accessible for those with disabilities. Most of our major parks have highways running through them, which is an issue. Not to mention the cracked sidewalks, potholes etc.

Question: Chairperson Bhitihara Fulton– During Covid, people would go sit and read and children with their grandmas would come to play. The parks were heavily utilized. Also, Council Member James Gennaro is working on funding to improve the water system in Captain Tilly Park. Although the project has been put on hold for now by the DEP, we won’t give up.

Answer: Ms. Palomino – We have another advocacy project on reforming the capital [budget] process because to get any construction project is a nightmare. It takes years of delays.

Question: James Gallagher – Does the Queens Borough Library systems partner with any of these participants? I don’t see them on this list. I wrote a program on the Friends of Fresh Meadows Library, and we are always looking to do activities and raise funds in the communities in Fresh Meadows.

Wendy Gennaro: – That would be a good partnership.

Question: DM Adam-Ovide – Even though you are New Yorkers for Parks, the Department of Parks and Recreation’s budget also includes funding for Forestry - things like new trees and their maintenance. It doesn’t say here how this is affected by not having enough money. If you go to a community board that doesn’t have actual parks, they will want to know how that affects the street trees that need to be maintained. We had the Million Trees initiative where trees were planted. What about the trees we already have? When they are not maintained, we end up spending more money to repair the

damage they cause. The first thing that was cut in the budget when the pandemic came was funding for Forestry. Soon after we had a storm that affected many trees.

Answer: Ms. Palomino – During the last round of budget cuts, they lost 26 workers specifically in the natural areas of the forestry department. They are part of our budget ask. So, in the next couple of weeks, we will be working to identify what the needs are to push for. They are always one of our priority areas. One of the issues we ran into was the cost of planting trees – they cost approximately \$3,000 a tree.

Question: - Chairperson Bhitihara Fulton – Concerning Forestry - trees die off and the city fills the tree wells with cement. They need to be maintained once planted. What plans do you have for maintenance?

Answer: Ms. Palomino – We are advocating for all of these things. We introduced Bill #1066 which was passed [in 2023]. Council Member James Gennaro supported it. The city must put together a comprehensive plan. Hopefully, in another year or so we will have a plan stating what those costs are.

DM Adam-Ovide – Usually, when we request a new tree, it used to take a year or a year and a half. We are a community board. We asked for a tree in front of our office many years ago. We are finally getting it in the spring. What confidence do I have to tell a resident who is calling requesting a tree when they may get it. It's an issue with funding and they cannot meet all the requests.

Question: DM Adam-Ovide – I was at a cabinet meeting this morning at the Borough President's office. DPR was there to speak about Let's Green NYC Program – it is a volunteer program. The Parks Department must realize they will not be able to meet the needs. They are asking people to come and volunteer for them. They don't have enough funds.

Answer: Ms. Palomino – The cut of the HRA program doesn't help.

DM Adam-Ovide – We want to help people get back on their feet. We don't want them to be on benefits for the rest of their life. That was the initial goal of this program to get people working.

Answer: Ms. Palomino – There were 400 jobs lost during the hiring freeze and were not replaced.

Question: Chairperson Bhitihara Fulton – So you want our support for advocating for 1% of the City's budget?

Answer: Ms. Palomino – Yes.

Chairperson Bhitihara Fulton asked for a motion.

Wendy Gennaro made a motion supporting New Yorkers for Parks' campaign for the 1% of the City's budget to fund the parks initiatives.

James Gallagher seconded the motion. The vote was unanimously approved.

James Gallagher made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:17 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Nettie Norris, Community Service Aide
January 10, 2024*