



New York City Council
Testimony of Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams
Committee on Parks and Recreation
October 22, 2020

Hello, my name is Eric Adams, and I am Brooklyn's borough president, representing more than 2.6 million residents who call Brooklyn home. I want to thank Council Member Peter Koo, chair of the Committee on Parks and Recreation, for convening this hearing on "Improving the Equity of Green Space Throughout the City in Light of the COVID Epidemic."

Parks are the lungs of our city. Deemed an essential public service during the COVID-19 epidemic, green spaces provide sanctuary for Brooklynites while helping them to maintain a healthy social distance. The availability to not only affordably, but safely, have an outlet for physical and mental rejuvenation is priceless.

To better understand Brooklyn parks, I released "The Pulse of Our Parks: An Assessment of Brooklyn's Open Space" on Monday, March 26, 2018, which analyzed 270 of the borough's parks that are more than half an acre in size to determine access to activities, comfort stations, drinking fountains, friends-of groups, programming, and publicly accessible Wi-Fi. At the time of the report:

- There were 877 parks in Brooklyn
- 27 percent of parks are associated with a non-profit or formal community group
- 89 percent have a drinking fountain
- 60 percent have a comfort station
- 12 percent have Wi-Fi access

While access does not mean equity, it is the first step in opening landscapes that can be used for physical and mental wellness. As we all know, minority and low-income communities were disproportionately affected by COVID-19. These communities largely reside within neighborhoods with the least amount of dedicated land to parks and open space.

This hearing seeks to improve the equity of green space throughout the City in light of COVID-19. I am submitting a few ideas that will address the inequality that has long plagued our city before the current pandemic.

Expansion of Existing Programs:

- Prioritize investments under the Community Parks Initiative in neighborhoods hardest hit by COVID-19 such as Brownsville, East New York, Sunset Park, and Bensonhurst and other underserved communities throughout New York City. Creating these spaces is integral to encourage physical activity, improve air quality, and utilize green infrastructure to enhance neighborhood inclusion.
- Parks Without Borders aims to make parks more accessible and welcoming. Considering streets and parks make up 40 percent of the public realm throughout the city, transforming underused spaces while making parks more accessible would be an equitable improvement to the hardest-hit neighborhoods.
- NYC Parks must expand Wi-Fi access to all parks through community and corporate partnerships and expansion of LinkNYC kiosks.

Community Engagement:

- Investigate duplicating the Open Space Alliance (OSA) model to other community districts across Brooklyn and New York City. The OSA is a non-profit conservancy that maintains, protects, and promotes open spaces over a large community, not just one specific park.
- The City should regularly convene existing friends-of parks groups to coordinate advocacy, best practices, and strategic investment, as well as support communities who are looking to start their own community-based park partnership.
- Cultivate the creation of park conservancies to foster the maintenance and operations of the green spaces.

Expanding Access:

- The largest share of public space in New York City is our street network. NYC Parks must work with the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) to identify potential street conversions in communities with limited green space such as Bensonhurst, Borough Park, East Flatbush, and Flatbush in Brooklyn, and similar neighborhoods across New York City.
- In neighborhoods that are further afield from destination parks, NYC Parks and DOT should partner to develop a “Safe Routes to Parks” program to ensure residents can easily and safely access parks by foot and bicycle.
- We must also build new parks. This is why I have allocated funding to innovative expansion projects such as BQ Green, which would deck the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway to recapture land lost to Robert Moses-era highway projects. I have provided funding toward the creation of new parks in areas disconnected from healthy green space, like Bushwick Inlet Park and areas abutting the Prospect Expressway, and I encourage

the Council to commission a study to identify additional potential park and playground sites throughout New York City.

As borough president, I have allocated more than \$39 million of capital funding to various parks projects in fiscal years 2015-2021. The crux of my funding has been toward expanding access in a more equitable manner, including more than \$5 million to fund perimeter access projects on the underserved edges of both Prospect and Fort Greene parks. I will continue my advocacy for the inclusion of park space and open space in uniform land use review procedure (ULURP) decisions, as well as to ensure that New York City's budget has a dedicated "Percent for Parks" in future budgets that puts real financial resources behind our mission of advancing equity. We all recognize the importance and need for green space and I applaud the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation for convening this important public hearing on improving the equity of green space throughout the city in light of the COVID-19 epidemic.

Thank you.