The Future of Parks and Public Space. What’s Next?

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NYC Parks By the Numbers

- 30,000 acres of parkland
- 10,000 acres of natural areas
- 1,900 parks
- 1,000 playgrounds
- 1,000 buildings
- 155 miles of coast
- 14 miles of public beaches
- 2 million trees in parks
- 670,000 street trees
- 67 pools
- 48 recreational facilities
- 17 nature centers
- 1,200 monuments
- 28 art exhibits
- 2,500 miles of GreenStreets
- 1,772 basketball courts
- 800 athletic fields
- 600 community gardens
- 500 tennis courts
- 13 golf courses
- 9 ice skating rinks
- 23 historic houses
- 14 green roofs
- 400 concession contracts
- 1,800 community groups
- 2,500 miles of GreenStreets
- 1,772 basketball courts
- 800 athletic fields
- 600 community gardens
- 500 tennis courts
- 13 golf courses
- 9 ice skating rinks
- 23 historic houses
- Over 540 active projects
7 years as Parks Commissioner

Department of Fun, Health and Happiness
850 capital projects completed
Prioritized diversity, equity, inclusion and access
Led agency with a culture of care
Leading with a “Culture of Care”
creating experiences through experience

McAdams

landscape architecture · land planning · civil engineering · stream + wetland design · geomatics · stormwater
Mid-19th Century: Gardens
Late 19th to early 20th Century: Landscape Architecture
1930-1965: Recreational Facilities Era
Late 20th Century: Environmental Movement
Late 20th Century: Environmental Movement
21st Century Challenges & Emerging Trends

- Graying and browning of America
- Rise of the single person households
- Traditional family is changing
- Aging infrastructure
- Urban sprawl, aging suburbs, shrinking rural areas
- **Climate change, extreme weather events**
- **Droughts, flooding, wildfires**
- Antiquated and exclusionary zoning tools
- Energy
- **Public health crisis**
- **Racial and social justice**
- Divisive politics
- Post-COVID behavior
What’s next for parks?

What role can parks and public space play?
Parks serve many roles

Parks are not just green spaces, but public spaces for people

Not just an amenity, but a vital part of the city’s essential infrastructure

First line of defense against climate change

Physical and mental well being
NYC Parks: Strategic Direction

1. Equity, Access and Inclusion

2. Planning & Placemaking

3. Resiliency & Sustainability

4. Caring for Parks (not just maintenance)

5. Innovation and Technology
Equity
Equity = Fairness
Framework for an Equitable Future

Photo: NYC Parks
Capital in Context

- NYC Parks spent ~ $5.7 billion on capital improvements over the past two decades
- Acquired 1,168 acres since 2001
- 81.5% New Yorkers live within a walk of a park
- Proximity vs. Quality
Equity in Context

- **215 parks** across the city received minimal capital investment - **less than $250,000** over 20 years
Community Parks Initiative

CPI Capital Program
Re-create **67 community parks**

Targeted Physical Improvements
**136 smaller-scale physical park improvement projects**
- All work done with in-house crews
- Repainting/repairing play equipment
- Repainting handball courts and multi-purpose play areas
- Repainting/repairing benches
- Improving horticultural areas and lawn restoration
- Sports coating
Park or parking lot?
Design Precedent for New Parks
Design Precedent for New Parks

Playground Ages 2-5

Fitness, Handball Courts, Gathering Areas
Design Precedent for New Parks

Planted Areas

Planting/Stormwater Capture
Design Precedent for New Parks

Multi-generational social seating
Garrison Park
The Bronx
Poor Access

Garrison Park
Existing Conditions

Garrison Park
Multi-Generational Space

Garrison Park
Grand Avenue Playground, Bronx
62 of 67 completed. Will improve 70 acres of urban parkland

Established new “friends of” groups at 82% of CPI parks

Usership increased by nearly 50% since Parks Equity renovation
Access

To be free of physical, cultural, financial and legal barriers (rules and regulations)
people may eat + sleep in their homes or apartments, but **THEY LIVE IN THE PUBLIC REALM.**
Consumer Preferences

Previous generations were **consumers of goods**.

New generations are **consumers of experiences**.

We should not be just designers and planners, but **experience builders**.
Reimagine the public space
What about the Public Realm?

Streets, sidewalks, bike lanes, parks, and public spaces are viewed as separate systems and managed by different agencies.

- Parks: 14%
- Streets and sidewalks: 26%
- **NYC Public Realm**: 40%

Photo: ny.curbed.com
The sidewalk adjacent to the park should be considered the outer park.

- Frederick Law Olmsted
OneNYC calls for greater access to parks for all New Yorkers. **Parks Without Borders** is a key strategy to achieve this goal. **$50 million** has been set aside to make it a reality.
Parks Without Borders is a **new design approach** focusing on improving the areas where parks and neighborhoods meet: **entrances, edges, and park-adjacent spaces**.
Entrances

Opening sight lines, removing gates, and adding furnishings and amenities can draw more people into the park.
Edges

Allowing better views into the park and making better use of the sidewalk can make neighborhoods more beautiful.
Park-Adjacent Spaces

Rethinking underused spaces and adding amenities can create new centers of community activity.
Travers Park
Queens
Capturing Park-Adjacent Spaces

TRIVERS
1.92 ACRES

78TH STREET
.85 ACRES

STAUNTON FIELD
.50 ACRES

PROJECT FOOTPRINT
3.27 ACRES
Existing Edge Condition

Travers Park
Perimeter Amenities

Travers Park
Existing Adjacent Space

Travers Park
Old Street Bed Transformed

Travers Park
City of Raleigh Redevelopment Areas

Within the redevelopment area, property may be acquired for the following purposes:

• To remove buildings which are structurally substandard;
• To remove other buildings in order to effectively remove blighting influences which are exerted on the area. Such blighted influences include, but are not limited to, incompatibility of use with the land use provisions of the plan and obsolete buildings not suitable for improvement or conversion;
• To provide sites for needed public improvements or facilities in proper relationship to the projected demand for such facilities or improvements;
• To expedite and ensure the improvement of underutilized property, vacant or vacated land, to meet the objectives of this plan;
• To clear sound and deficient buildings to the extent necessary to assemble land into parcels of adequate shape and size to meet contemporary development needs and standards and to allow new construction of key development opportunities;
• To clear, move, hold, rehabilitate, restore, or otherwise improve for resale substandard properties which, after due process as described herein or in plan amendments, are not improved under an approved publicly subsidized or funded program or rehabilitation and repair.

Gateway Triangle, Brooklyn
Gateway Triangle (after)
Build on the Administration’s Commitment to Equity

Mayor committed $650M+ to Manhattan Greenway
Greenway

Both a destination and a thoroughfare

Provide access to nature

Connect neighborhoods safely

Promote physical activity among diverse users
Outer Borough Greenways

**Bike to the Beach**
Create a high-quality connection to Coney Island in Brooklyn

**The Queens Necklace**
Upgrade the existing Central Queens Greenway

**Ride the River**
Making connections along the Harlem River in the Bronx

**Ferry to the Levee**
Staten Island Ferry connection to the new levee
Bike to the Beach

Coney Island Connection:

Before
Bike to the Beach

Coney Island Connection:
Inclusion
Inclusion

- To be included and not excluded
- **For all people** in design process and community engagement
- Avoid designing **exclusive** parks and public spaces
- Make the spaces and places that are welcoming and safe for all
- Create a sense of belonging. “**I feel welcome here. I belong here.**”
**Loitering** – to stand or wait around idly or without an apparent purpose – *Oxford Dictionary*

In 2017, NYC Parks removed “loitering” as a park rule as part of Criminal Justice Reform Act.
Arts in Parks

This booth was informed by the “Yes Loitering” Project.

A public space and safety youth initiative that sought:

• to investigate how teens might be excluded from or targeted in public spaces and

• develop ideas on how to create more youth-powered spaces.
No adults except in the company of a child

www.nyc.gov/parks
We have re-signed a total of 516 (of our 1,010) playgrounds as adults allowed.

This one change increased access to parks by 50% for adults (12 years old and over).
Astoria Park, Queens
Reflect on the disruptions
# Natural Reactions to Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHYSICAL</th>
<th>EMOTIONAL</th>
<th>BEHAVIORAL</th>
<th>COGNITIVE</th>
<th>SPIRITUAL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exhaustion</td>
<td>Shock and disbelief</td>
<td>Not acting like yourself</td>
<td>Trouble concentrating</td>
<td>Feelings of emptiness or loss of purpose</td>
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<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Emotional outbursts</td>
<td>Memory problems</td>
<td>Questioning basic values and beliefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dizziness</td>
<td>Sorrow</td>
<td>Argumentativeness</td>
<td>Trouble making decisions</td>
<td>Withdrawing from or suddenly turning to spirituality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Energy</td>
<td>Numbness</td>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
<td>Raised or lowered alertness</td>
<td>Cynicism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nausea</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Social withdrawal</td>
<td>Trouble identifying familiar objects</td>
<td>Alienation or loss of connection from others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweating, chills</td>
<td>Agitation</td>
<td>Restlessness</td>
<td>Flashbacks or intrusive images</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rapid Heart Rate</td>
<td>Irritability and anger</td>
<td>Changes in appetite, sex drive or sleep patterns</td>
<td>Confusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trouble Sleeping</td>
<td>Grief and guilt</td>
<td>Smoking or using drugs or alcohol</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trouble Breathing</td>
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<td>Source: NYC Department of Mental Health and Hygiene</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: NYC Department of Mental Health and Hygiene
TINY TRAUMA STEWARDSHIP INSTITUTE'S
SURVIVAL GUIDE

PROTECT YOUR MORNINGS
[or whenever you wake up]
less cortisol, more intentionality.

GO OUTSIDE
[or look outside]
perspective, context + something larger than this.

BE ACTIVE
[avoid stagnation]
in body, mind, spirit.

CULTIVATE RELATIONSHIPS
those that are edifying + healthy.

NURTURE GRATITUDE
what is one thing, right now, that is going well?

DETOX
if navigating addictions, be wise + safe
limit news + social media.

SPEND TIME WITH ANIMALS
↓ stress hormones, ↑ comfort.

METABOLIZE EXPERIENCING
re-regulate your nervous system.

SIMPLIFY
[less is more,]
be aware of decision fatigue + cognitive overload.

ADMIRE ART
the gift of feeling transported.

LAUGH
pure humor = a sustaining force.

FOSTER HUMILITY & EXTEND GRACE
self-righteousness + hubris = unhelpful.

SLEEP
to cleanse + repair brain + body.

CLARIFY INTENTIONS
how can I refrain from causing harm, how can I contribute meaningfully?

BE REALISTIC + COMPASSIONATE
[with yourself]
be mindful of the quality of your presence; it means so much to others.
parks + greenways became our sanctuaries of sanity
parks have the power to heal and bring joy
Parks should be considered part of our healthcare system
How Pandemics Spurred Cities to Make More Green Space for People

From wider, tree-lined boulevards to lush parks, 19th-century cholera pandemics shaped some of the world’s most famous urban landscapes.

CHRISTOPHER KLEIN

Future Place
Putting equity, diversity and inclusion into action by telling stories in our parks and public spaces.

Lifted a 60-year moratorium of new monuments in Central Park and approved the first monument of real women in Central Park.
Parks have the power to bring joy
It's okay to hug me

A tree is the original healthcare worker
Create an equitable and inclusive parks and public spaces that is accessible to all and has the power to heal and bring joy.
THANK YOU

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