

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

A vibrant park scene with people walking on a paved path, lush greenery, and a city skyline in the background. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. In the foreground, three women are walking towards the camera on a paved path. The woman on the left is wearing a black top and a green patterned skirt, carrying a camera. The woman in the middle is wearing a bright yellow top and patterned shorts. The woman on the right is wearing a maroon top and light blue shorts. In the background, there are several tall, modern buildings and a large green structure, possibly a bridge or overpass. The park is filled with various plants, including weeping willows and flowering shrubs. A man in a white tank top is standing on the left side of the path, looking at his phone. There are also some red wooden structures, possibly gazebos or benches, in the background.

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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**

7,000 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs)

**\$600M** FY22 Expense Budget

**\$4.0B** 10-year Capital Budget

**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

# urban spaces



parks





Mid-19th Century:  
Gardens



Late 19th to early 20th Century:  
**Landscape Architecture**



1930-1965:  
**Recreational Facilities Era**



Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century:  
**Environmental Movement**



Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century:  
**Environmental Movement**



# 21<sup>st</sup> 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**







Photo Credit: Scientific American



Photo credit: News & Observer



Source: Weather Underground

A photograph of a park area. In the foreground, there are several wooden benches with black metal frames on a paved walkway. To the left, there is a brick wall and some tall grasses. In the background, there are large green trees, a paved path, and a body of water. A street sign and a lamp post are also visible.

**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

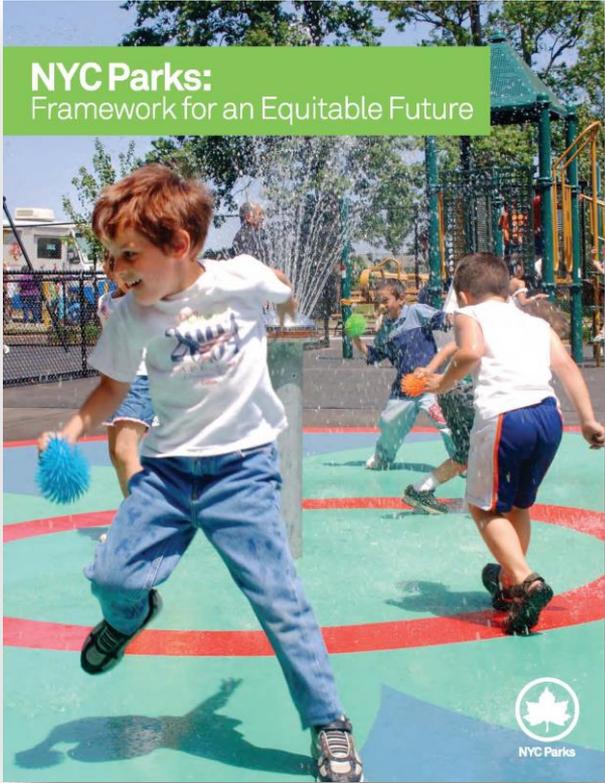
- 1. Equity, Access and Inclusion**
- 2. Planning & Placemaking**
3. Resiliency & Sustainability
4. Caring for Parks (not just maintenance)
5. Innovation and Technology



Equity

**Equity = Fairness**

# Framework for an Equitable Future



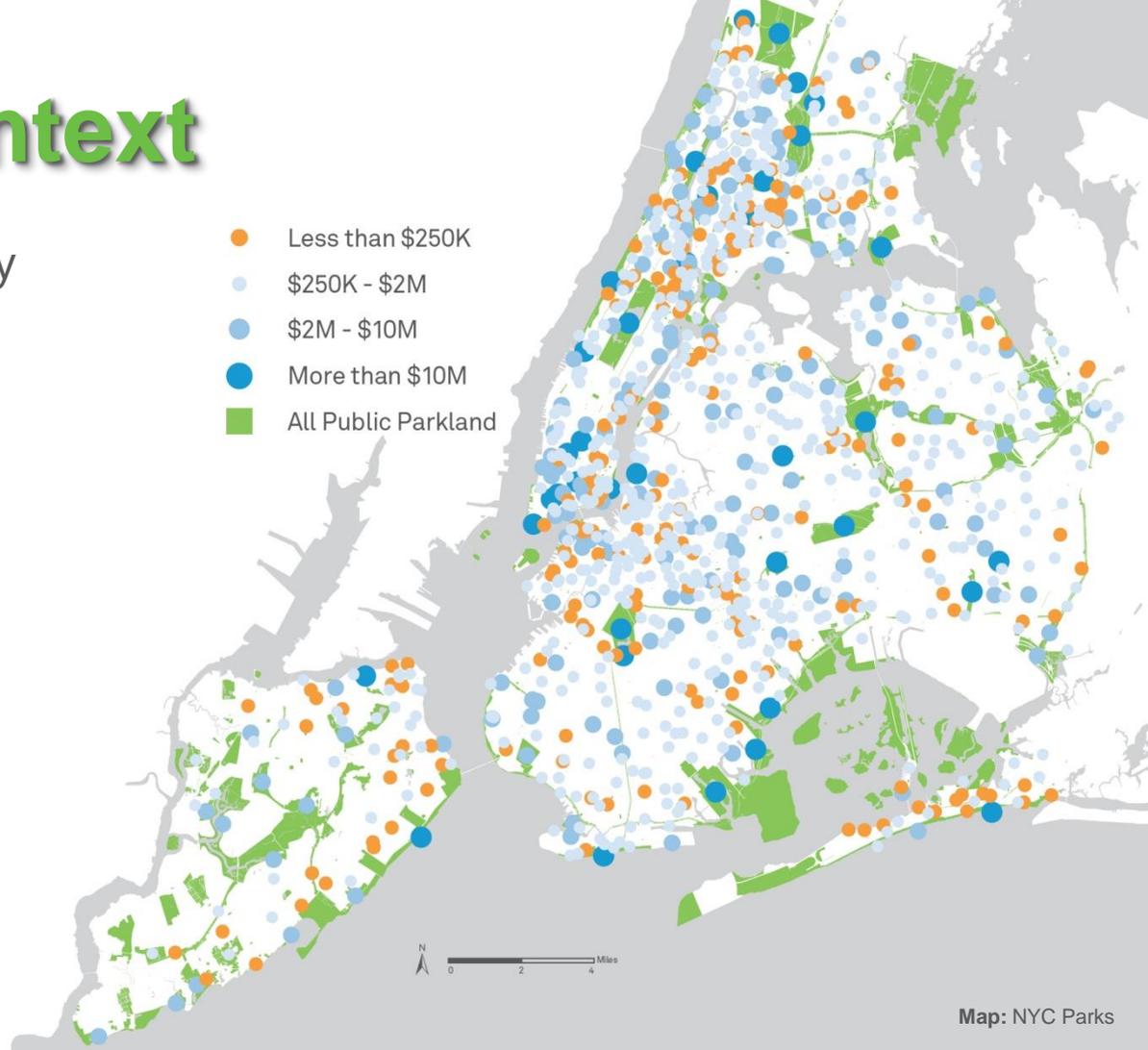
# Capital in Context

- 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



FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH PLAYGROUND // THE BRONX



SOUTH PACIFIC PLAYGROUND // BROOKLYN



SEAN'S PLACE // QUEENS



**Park or parking lot?**



Stockton Playground, Brooklyn

# Design Precedent for New Parks



Spray Showers



Adult Fitness

# 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



# Existing Conditions



Garrison Park



# Multi-Generational Space



**Garrison Park**



Hostos Community College



Grand Avenue Playground, Bronx











Cool Pools NYC



# Parks Equity Results

**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



Van Alst Playground, Queens



# 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%
<b>NYC Public Realm</b>	<b>40%</b>



Photo: ny.curbed.com



The sidewalk adjacent to the park  
should be considered the outer park  
- *Frederick Law Olmsted*

Rufus King Park, Queens



Bellrose Playground, Queens



Guernsey St

DO NOT  
ENTER  
ALL  
TRAFFIC  
→

Father Jerry Popieluszko Square, Brooklyn



Thomas Greene Playground, Brooklyn



Thomas Greene Playground, Brooklyn





# Parks Without Borders

Parks

# One New York

## The Plan for a Strong and Just City



The City of New York  
Mayor Bill de Blasio

Anthony Shorris  
First Deputy Mayor

**NYC**

**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.

### Initiative 2

**Improve open spaces through Parks Without Borders, a new strategy to enhance neighborhood access and connectivity**



Father Demo Square

Parks Without Borders is a new effort to make our city's outdoor spaces more welcoming, accessible, and better connected to surrounding neighborhoods.

The quality of a city's outdoor space depends on an integrated system in which parks, sidewalks, pedestrian plazas, and other open spaces are connected to each other, improving access to neighborhood resources and promoting community interaction.

To make Parks Without Borders a reality, NYC Parks will take a new approach to park entrances and boundaries where they most directly interact with the surrounding community. NYC Parks will improve fences and gates and add other amenities, such as public art and landscaping, to make entrances more inviting. Along park boundaries, we

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.



Before



After

# Edges

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



Before



After

# Park-Adjacent Spaces

Rethinking underused spaces and adding amenities can create new centers of community activity.



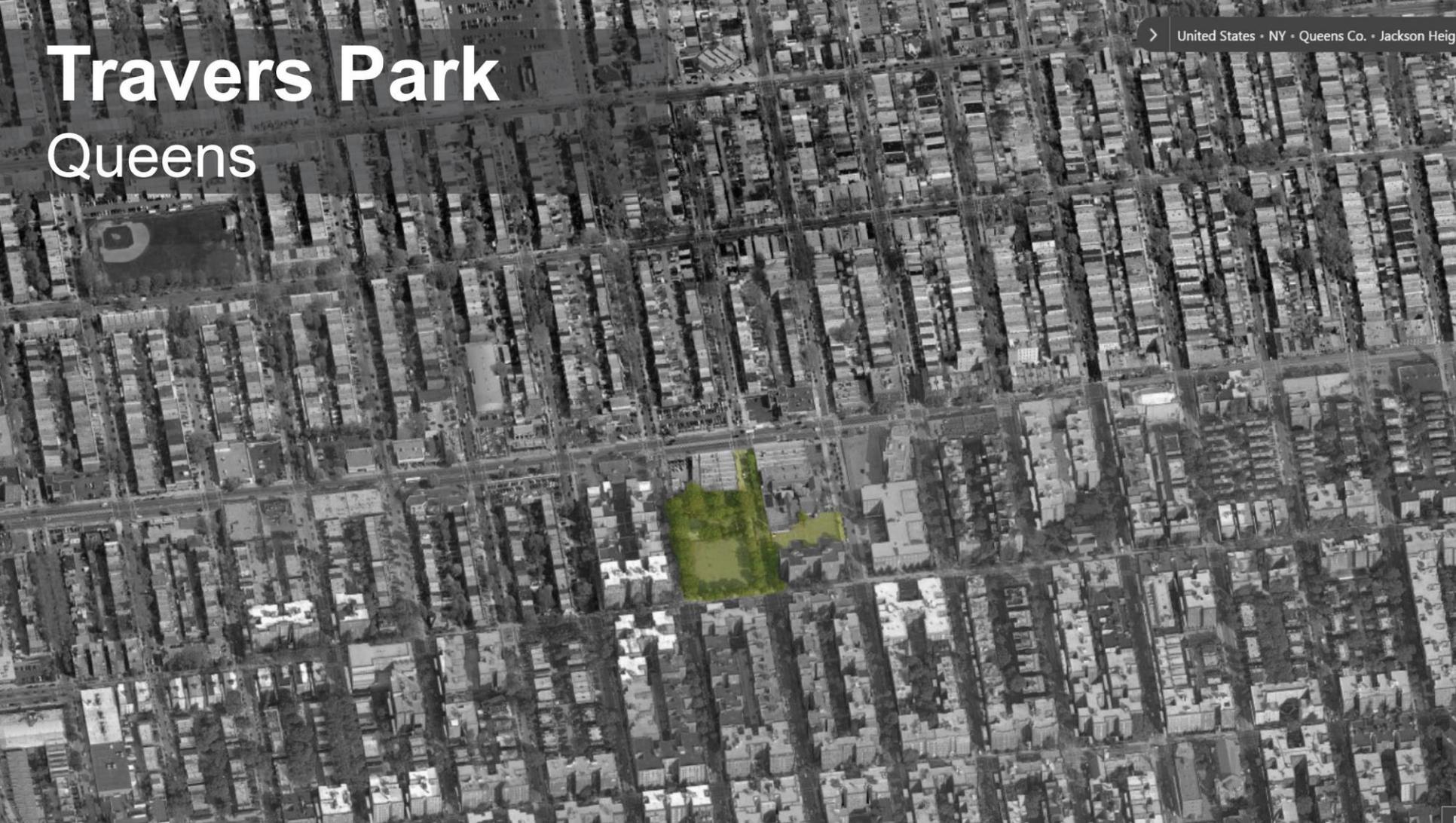
Before



After

# Travers Park

## Queens



# Capturing Park-Adjacent Spaces



NYC Parks



+



+



=



Travers Park

# Existing Edge Condition



# Transforming the Edge



Travers Park

# Perimeter Amenities



# Existing Adjacent Space



# Old Street Bed Transformed



Travers Park





**Gateway Triangle, Brooklyn**



Gateway Triangle, Brooklyn

# Gateway Triangle (after)





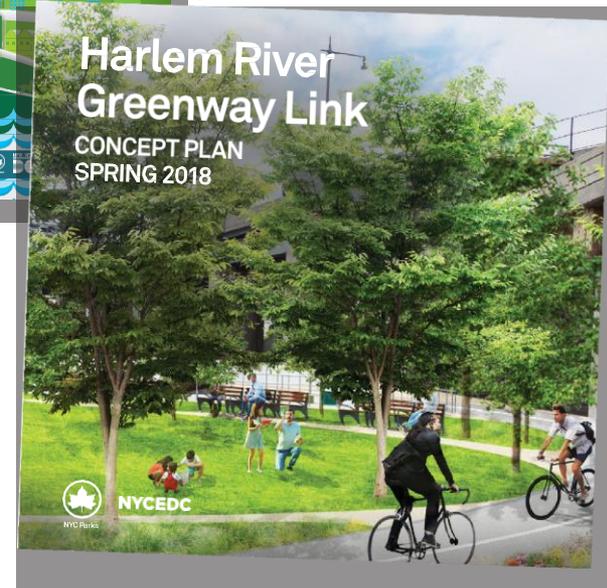
# *Destination: Greenways!*

Outer Borough  
Greenways

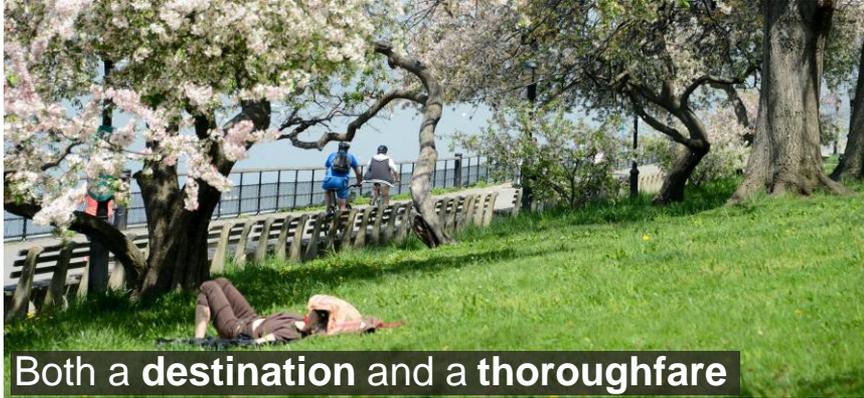
# Build on the Administration's Commitment to Equity



Mayor  
committed  
**\$650M+** to  
Manhattan  
Greenway



# Greenway



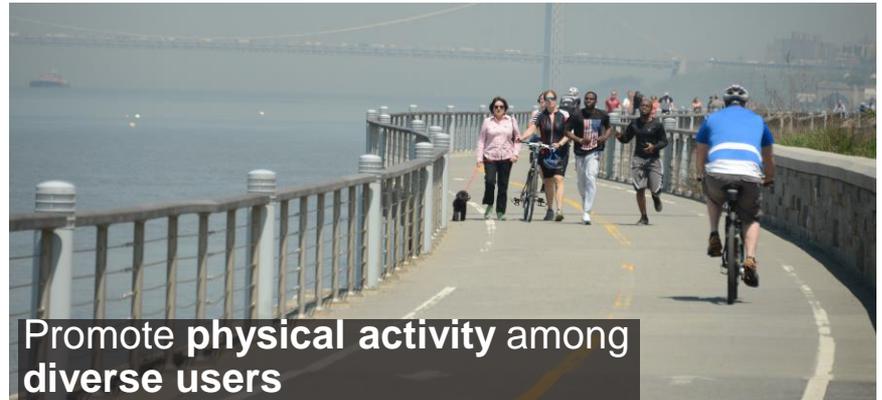
Both a **destination** and a **thoroughfare**



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

- 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**.



Chat Travieso, *The Boogie Down (Youth) Booth*  
June 1, 2019 to May 31, 2020  
Keltch Park, Bronx

**No adults except  
in the company  
of a child**



**[www.nyc.gov/parks](http://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**



Photo credit: iStock, Penn Today, University of Pennsylvania

# Natural Reactions to Stress

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



# THE TRAUMA STEWARDSHIP INSTITUTE'S *Tiny* 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 ALL YOU ARE 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.

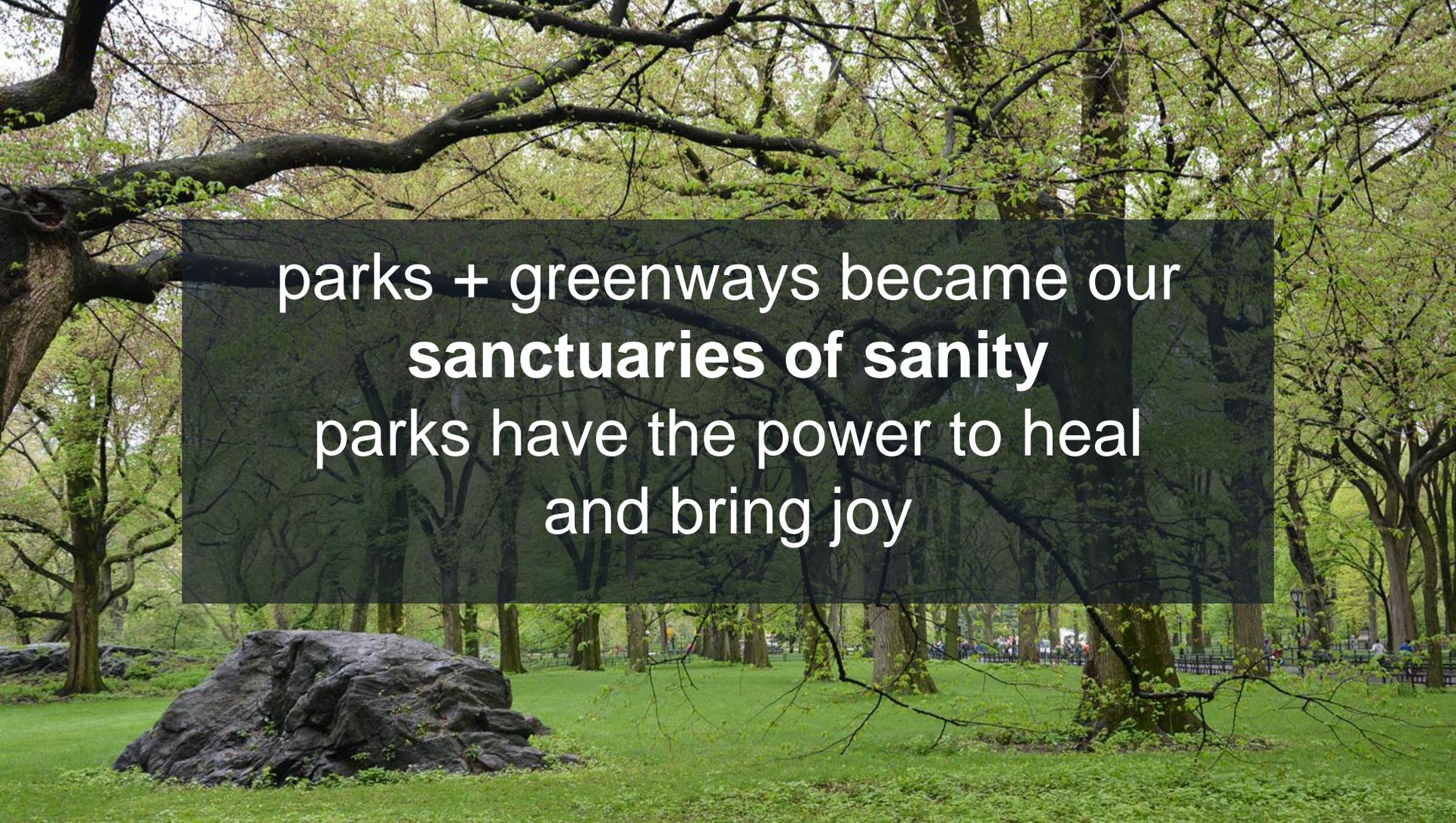


**SLEEP**  
to cleanse + repair brain + body.

**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**



UPDATED: APR 28, 2020 · ORIGINAL: APR 27, 2020

# 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.

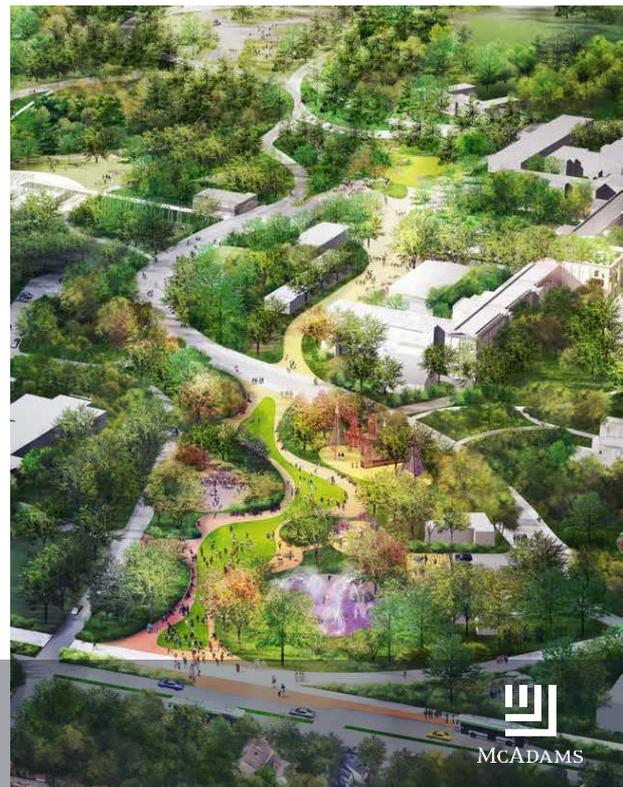
CHRISTOPHER KLEIN

**Future Place**

Source: History.com and The Print Collector/Getty Images.



**Dorothea Dix Park, Plaza + Play / Raleigh, NC**  
Image credit (left): Michael Van Valkenburg Associates Inc.









Duke University, Water Harvesting Pond + Trails / Durham, NC



CAMPO, Triangle Bikeway Study / Raleigh, NC

JUNETEENTH  
GROVE



NYC Parks











**WELCOME**  
WELCOME TO THE NEWLY OPENED JAMES BALDWIN LAWN AND LANGSTON HUGHES PLAYGROUND. THIS SPACE IS A GIFT TO THE COMMUNITY AND A PLACE FOR ALL TO ENJOY.

**BENEFITS**  
LANGSTON HUGHES PLAYGROUND IS A PLACE FOR ALL TO ENJOY. IT IS A PLACE FOR ALL TO ENJOY. IT IS A PLACE FOR ALL TO ENJOY.

**OPERATING HOURS**  
7:00 AM - 6:00 PM, MONDAY THROUGH SUNDAY  
For the most up-to-date information on operating hours, please visit [nycgovparks.org](#).

**NYC Parks Supports the Black Community**  
NYC Parks is committed to providing a safe and inclusive space for all. We are proud to support the Black community and provide a place for all to enjoy.





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

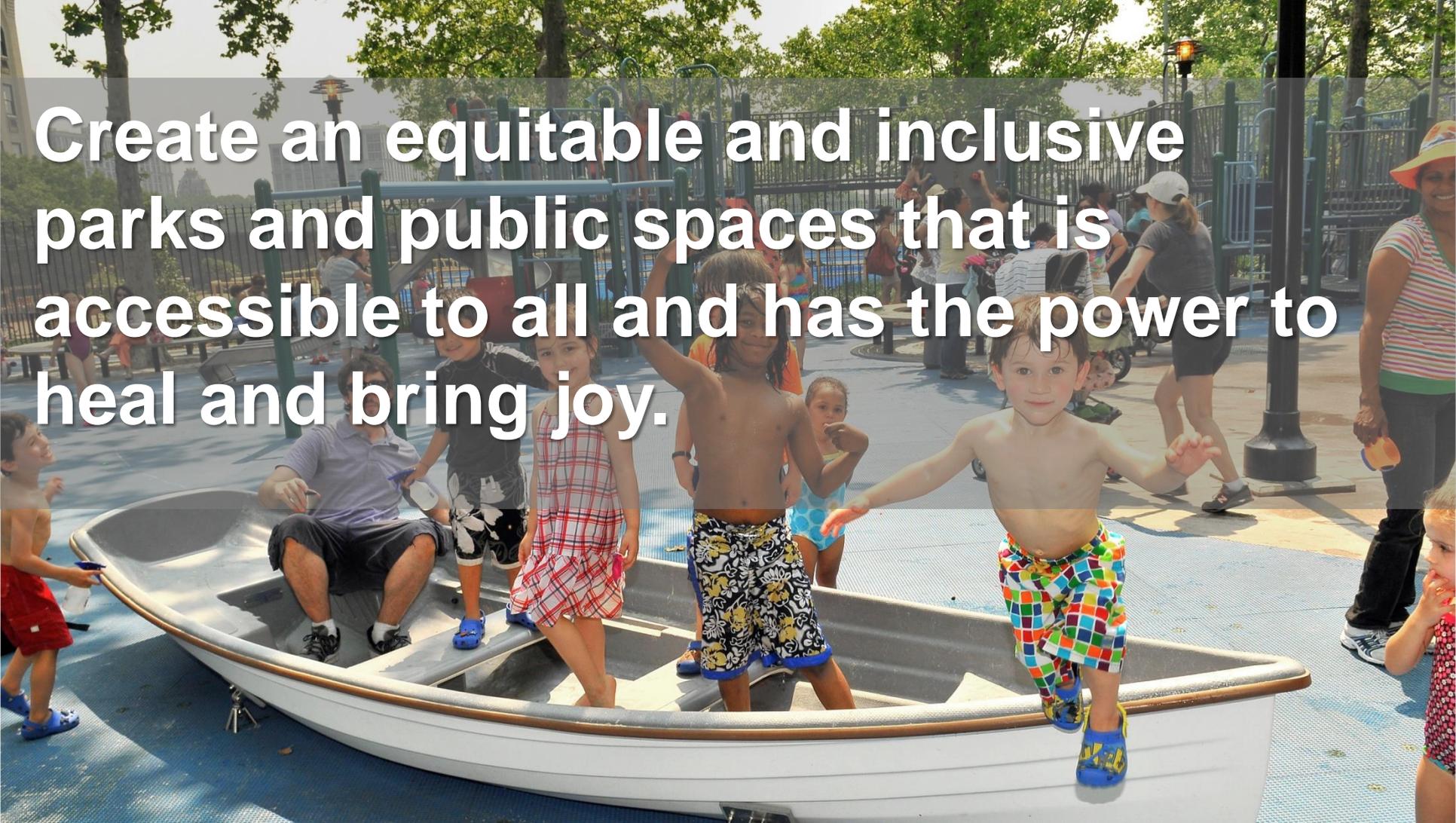




# It's okay to hug me

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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Twitter & Instagram: [@mitchell\\_silver](https://www.instagram.com/mitchell_silver)