



**New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
Oversight Hearing – An Overview on the Department of Parks and Recreations'
Partnerships for Parks Program
November 17, 2016
Tupper Thomas, Executive Director**

Good morning, my name is Tupper Thomas, and I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks. I want to thank the Council Committee on Parks and Recreation for inviting us to speak on this issue. For almost thirty years the Partnerships for Parks program has provided an invaluable service to the city, and we believe New York's communities would be best served with one Outreach Coordinator in every community board district.

Over the past two years New Yorkers for Parks has held borough and citywide meetings with parks advocates and stewards from across the five boroughs. Almost every group spoke very highly of the support they've received from their Partnerships Outreach Coordinator. But we also heard again and again that the Outreach Coordinators are stretched too thin, and unable to provide the level of support the groups are looking for. We've also heard this from current and former Partnerships staff members – they love the work that they do and see how important it is to the city, but are frustrated that they cannot accomplish more due to lack of staff.

The volunteerism and advocacy of "Friends of Parks" and other community groups has a significant impact on the quality of our parks. For many of these groups, a large part of their success can be attributed to the support they receive from Partnerships staff, particularly Outreach Coordinators. Without Partnerships many groups would not be able to get off the ground, much less thrive.

This support is especially important in low-income communities that may not have the resources to start a group without assistance. Volunteers often become advocates for their parks, working with community boards and elected officials to improve open space. The experience of starting and sustaining a successful parks group can inspire confidence and optimism within communities, and empower them to form additional groups tackling other issues when they see the tangible results they can achieve in their park.

Partnerships currently works with 700 parks groups, and has 300 more starting up. From March through November they host 100 "It's My Park Day" events every month. These do not include the Partnerships Academy, networking and other events they host.

The true success of the CPI capital program, which has moved so quickly through the process, is the enormous work done by the Outreach Coordinators to bring residents to the Community Visioning Sessions.

Partnerships for Parks plays a major role in New Yorkers for Parks' partnership with the Parks Department on the Daffodil Project by distributing and planting our daffodil bulbs in communities across the city.

This is an impressive amount of work, to put it mildly. Imagine how much healthier our parks would be if Partnerships for Parks had enough staff to provide adequate coverage to all New York City neighborhoods. To start to reach this goal we recommend having one Outreach Coordinator in every community board district.

Thank you