



City of New York
Parks & Recreation

Biennial Report
2004-2005

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Letter from the Mayor, First Deputy Mayor, and the Parks & Recreation Commissioner

Dear Friends:

This is a golden age for New York City's parks. From the North Bronx to Lower Manhattan to the south shore of Staten Island, we are investing in new parks, restoring historic parks, and improving parks of every kind. This includes building new recreation centers, new soccer and baseball fields, and new nature trails — as well as revitalizing one of our City's greatest assets: our waterfront. New Yorkers and our visitors now have more opportunities to enjoy spectacular open spaces throughout the five boroughs. In fact, over the last five years, we have added more than 300 acres of new parkland.

As we have worked to expand and improve our parks, we have also created more ways for New Yorkers of all ages to explore their diverse — and ever changing — recreational interests. For instance, we have built the City's first official cricket pitch and surfing beach, as well as skate parks in every borough. We are also proud of the new programs and activities that have been created for children and adults, the renewed stewardship and care for our parks and street trees, and the expanded outreach to our City's volunteer groups.

Creating a world-class park system is essential in building a city of opportunity where people want to live, work, and raise families. With the help of New Yorkers and our many partners, the future of the City's parks is brighter, and greener, than ever. As you read through the Biennial Report for 2004-2005, we hope that you will join us in creating a majestic system of parks for the 21st century.

Sincerely,

Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor

Patricia E. Harris
First Deputy Mayor

Adrian Benepe
Commissioner



Expansion

Today, we are staking out the next 70 years of park expansion. During our first term, Parks & Recreation acquired more than 300 acres of parkland, rejuvenated parkland throughout the Bronx, Lower Manhattan, and along the waterfront, and made plans for creating more than 2,300 acres of new parks. We are also enriching the park user's experience by creating programs, events, and stewardship opportunities that promote a healthful, active, and vibrant lifestyle for New Yorkers of all ages.

New York City is engaged in its third great era of expansion. In the 1870s, park designers Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux created many of the jewels of New York City's emerald empire. Major parks, such as Central Park and Prospect Park, were built, and green parkways connected neighborhoods. Later, in the Works Progress Administration era of the 1930s, much of the infrastructure of the City's parks system was created and park acreage tripled.

Parks & Recreation has its largest budget ever for new capital projects, and, most important, we are managing our resources wisely. We are developing our workforce and deploying it creatively to build community support that lasts a lifetime. Today, there are more opportunities than ever to enjoy one of the largest and most varied urban park systems in the nation.

A young boy plays basketball on a brand-new court in his local playground. An older woman, determined to improve her level of fitness, learns about nutrition and takes active steps to get healthy. A family has a young sapling planted in front of their new home. A senior citizen bikes along a newly built neighborhood greenway. In New York City, parks are necessary both for their intrinsic natural splendor and for their value as an oasis in the country's most populated urban environment.



A child plays on equipment at Sam Curtis Playground in Brooklyn.

Opposite: The \$70 million reconstruction of the East River Park promenade began in 2005.



Expanding Our Parkland

Icahn Stadium, which opened in April, 2005, on Randall's Island, is the sole International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) Class 1-certified, championship-quality track-and-field facility in North America for local, national and international outdoor competition. The stadium was financed with \$24 million in public funds and another \$18 million in private donations, including a generous gift of \$10 million from Randall's Island Sports Foundation (RISF) trustees and donors Carl and Gail Icahn, who made the largest gift ever from a private donor to a New York City park facility. Since its opening, the track has hosted international world-class events, along with community events, including the annual Mayor's Cup, featuring track-and-field competitors from public, parochial, and independent high schools.

Icahn Stadium is just one example of a commitment to expanding parks and recreation facilities that has been realized over the past two years. More than 300 acres of parkland have been added in that time, creating signature parks that will endure for decades. We have heeded our pledge to beautify the City's waterfront, and more than five miles of greenway have been completed. Many neighborhood parks were recently reinvigorated by thorough renovations that bring a world-class character to local open spaces. For example, the same track surface that is used in the internationally accredited Icahn Stadium was also installed in 2005 in Kaiser Park in Brooklyn, Detective Keith Williams Park in Queens, and three other neighborhood parks around the City. There will be a single standard for all parks, whether it is the smallest greenstreet on Midland Avenue, the gates of Forest Park, or a gleaming new stadium at the foot of the Triborough Bridge.



As the starter's pistol goes off, thousands of fans simultaneously leap to their feet, cheering on the racers on the track below them. At Icahn Stadium, this is a scene that has been repeated dozens of times since the opening of the stadium. While the cheering is constant, the racers themselves have ranged from Olympic athletes to NCAA champions and from high school competitors to children from local recreation center programs.

Opposite: Runners compete at the Reebok Grand Prix, one of many events held at the newly built Icahn Stadium (above).



Capital Projects

Rebuilding Bronx Parks

In 2004, the City Council approved the construction of a water-filtration plant for the Croton Water Supply System under the Mosholu Golf Course in Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx. As part of the agreement, more than \$220 million will be spent on 65 projects in 37 parks in the Bronx. By the close of 2006, work will have started on more than \$30 million in Bronx projects that have been supported by the funds from this mitigation process, and another \$44 million will be in the design phase.

Fort Totten Park

The historic Fort Totten Park in Queens, which was once a Civil War-era fort and more recently has been used by the City's Fire Department and the United States Army Reserves, was opened to the public in 2005. Twelve million dollars in funds from the Office of the Mayor have been allocated for park construction. The park provides access to New York's military history, while adding 49.5 acres of new parkland to the City's waterfront. The battery of the fort is open, and the park includes 11 historic buildings, a 13-acre parade ground with soccer fields, and pathways with majestic views of the East River.

Lower Manhattan

After the attacks of September 11, we joined Governor George E. Pataki and the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) in support of new open spaces in the Financial District in an effort to bring new life to a devastated neighborhood. LMDC allocated more than \$25 million in federal funding to create or enhance 13 different greenspaces in Lower Manhattan. All 13 projects were completed and opened to the public by the end of 2005, and, thanks to an additional \$40 million from the LMDC,

design is set to begin on another round of projects in 2006. An example of the dramatic change that has taken place in Lower Manhattan is the renovation of the Battery Bosque Gardens. The new garden contains 100,000 plants and flowers, as well as a fountain and outdoor lighting. Not only does this reshape one of New York City's landmark parks, it provides a spectacular view of New York Harbor for the millions of residents and visitors who frequent Battery Park each year.

Bloomingdale Park

Staten Islanders have a new active space to take their children to the playground or to practice their favorite sport. The 138-acre Bloomingdale Park received a \$20 million makeover in 2004. It now offers 15 acres of active recreation, including new ball fields, basketball courts, a playground, a bocce court, a network of landscaped pathways, and improved vehicular access.

Neighborhood Parks

Our focus includes both flagship parks and local parks. Over the past two fiscal years, 451 capital projects were completed throughout every area of the City. Perhaps no park better exemplifies the spirit of renaissance than Maria Hernandez Park, a century-old local park in Brooklyn that was last updated in the early 1970s. The park was in dire need of a modern renovation to appeal to today's children. About half of the \$900,000 budget for this project was spent on creating a colorful, cheerful play area with equipment for various age groups. The park's entrance and comfort stations were constructed in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, while the playground was refurbished by engaging play equipment and repainted with a striking rainbow hue. Today, Maria Hernandez Park is safe, clean, and a place where children want to play.

Over the last two years, jackhammers, bulldozers, and newly planted trees were common in parks across the City. Parks everywhere are being built anew and updated, with more than \$1.2 billion in capital improvements earmarked for the next two years. Clearly, the quality of our designs matches our increased funding, as over the past two years our capital projects have received five Art Commission awards for their designs. Here are some highlights of major projects that were completed in 2004 and 2005, and of major upcoming projects:

2004-2005

Projects Started: 611

Projects Completed: 525

Design Starts: \$435 mil.

Design Completions: \$393 mil.

Construction Starts: \$350 mil.

Construction Completions: \$279 mil.

Opposite: The recently stabilized ruins of Fort Totten were opened to the public in 2005.

Waterfronts & Greenways



New York began as a port city, and today new parks overlooking harbors, bridges, rivers, and oceans are reconnecting New Yorkers to their waterfront. We have pledged to work toward the completion of the citywide greenway, which will ultimately be a 350-mile system of recreation trails.

Our goal is to make New York City the most beautiful and accessible harbor city in the world, and our park system is on its way to meeting that goal. Currently, flagship waterfront sites are being established throughout the City. Over the next four years, more than \$420 million in capital improvements will be applied to our waterfront to create new parks and enhance existing access to our shoreline and waterways. Our new parkland design recognizes our maritime and industrial history while featuring spaces for contemplation and for active recreation. Greenway paths will connect people to the waterfront and also to one another. The greenway will be extended along the waterfront, enabling New Yorkers to enjoy biking or jogging in areas that have, in some cases, been closed to them for more than two centuries.

Greenways

Over the past two years, 5.6 miles of greenways have been added and there is currently more than \$200 million in city, state, and federal funds for 41.6 miles of new greenways and enhancements. Many greenways are in construction in all five boroughs throughout the City. For example, Queens residents will be able to bike their way along the Queens East River North Shore Greenway. Currently in the design phase, this greenway will stretch nearly 11 miles along the Queens waterfront and through its neighborhoods, from the Pulaski Bridge all the way to the Flushing Bay Esplanade.

Bronx River Forest Floodplain Restoration

Sometimes the best option for the City's waterfront is to restore it to its natural splendor. A \$1.6 million project to restore the Bronx River Forest floodplain was completed in June, 2005. A boardwalk was installed, which will increase access to the river while also

Bicyclists at Pelham Bay Park, part of New York City's greenway system.



allowing the riverbanks to flood naturally, supplying native plant and animal life with a crucial habitat. In all, more than 8 acres of the Bronx River were restored, including a dormant athletic field that was transformed into a natural floodplain.

Manhattan Waterfront Parks

We have given the Manhattan waterfront a historic face-lift along every river. With \$69 million in Mayoral funding, the bulkheads of East River Park are being entirely rebuilt to make the park safe, accessible, and beautiful. In 2005, a \$4 million renovation created better athletic space along the East River. A section of greenway paths in Harlem River Park are also under construction. And, on the west side of Manhattan, a third phase of Riverside Park South was completed, including the preservation of Pier D, a historic ruin of the former Baltimore and Ohio Rail Yard upon which Riverside Park South now stands.

Greenpoint-Williamsburg Rezoning

We have made a priority of reclaiming the waterfront from its industrial roots, and the City Planning Department, Economic Development Corporation, and Parks & Recreation jointly worked for a historic rezoning that was approved by the New York City Council in May, 2005. Brooklyn's waterfront will be revitalized with an esplanade stretching from Greenpoint to Williamsburg, adding nearly 50 acres of new and improved parkland to a thriving community, including a new park at the former site of the WNYC radio station transmitter. In addition, a 28-acre park at Bushwick Inlet will be built to reclaim a derelict waterfront for active recreation and breathtaking river views.

Staten Island Waterfront

In 2004 and 2005, there were both improvements to existing parks and also newly created parks across much of Staten Island's South Shore. In late 2005, the 265-acre Conference House Park and Visitors Center opened after a \$9 million renovation that provided formal paths for the first time to unify the park. Also in 2005, the South Fin Grill and the Vanderbilt catering hall, \$3 million restaurant facilities, were completed and opened in South Beach. Both projects were supported with leadership and funding from Staten Island Borough President James P. Molinaro. At Midland Beach, we added \$3 million in improvements, including the Freedom Circle, a tribute to American ideals set against the Atlantic Ocean. Many of Staten Island's new enhancements are now also interconnected with the borough's greenway system. Soon, waterfront bikeway access will stretch from Fort Wadsworth all the way to Great Kills Park.

Expanding Athletic Options



The options for New York City's amateur athletes have increased, regardless of the size or shape of the ball or puck that they may use. Not only are there better golf courses and ball fields but new recreation centers are dotting our landscape for the first time since the 1970s. The two newly built Manhattan centers, as well as the two in development in Queens and Staten Island, will literally help reshape our citizens into active members of the City's parks system.

Above: A bicyclist performs an aerial stunt at the opening of Staten Island's Midland Beach Skate Park in 2005.

Opposite: A new synthetic turf soccer field at Southern Fields in Ozone Park, Queens, opened in 2005.

Golf Courses

Golf in New York City has entered a new era. Our golf courses are undergoing more than \$45 million in privately funded improvements that include full restorations of historic courses and clubhouses. Clubhouses at Dyker Beach in Brooklyn and Pelham-Split Rock in the Bronx, for example, will be expanded to include new banquet facilities that will increase public access to these architectural gems. New Yorkers are now also able to reserve tee times online, so that they never miss a round at the local links.

Skate Parks and Mountain Biking

With the opening of Rockaway Skate Park in Queens, in 2004, and Midland Beach Skate Park, Staten Island's first skate park, in 2005, there is now a skate park in each borough, and six in total. Three more skate parks will be in progress by the end of 2006, bringing the citywide total to nine. Ground has also been broken on New York City's first mountain-biking and BMX trail, which will bring 2.5 miles of "extreme" pathways to Washington Heights.

New Recreation Centers

In 2004, Chelsea Recreation Center opened in Lower Manhattan, the first new center to be constructed in over 30 years. Also, the East 54th Street Recreation Center reopened after a \$7.7 million refurbishment funded by the New York City Council and the Mayor. The Greenbelt Recreation Center in Staten Island is scheduled to be completed in 2006, and Fowler Recreation Center in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, Queens, is currently under construction and is slated for completion in 2007. They will feature new and expansive sports facilities, such as a soccer field and croquet lawn in Staten Island and racquetball courts and an indoor track in Queens,

as well as enrich Parks Afterschool, fitness, and computer programming at both facilities. In Queens, another new \$55 million complex in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park will include an Olympic-size indoor pool and a regulation indoor ice rink. Each center will reach new neighborhoods, furthering our commitment to serve all New Yorkers.

New Ball Fields

This administration pledged to improve the City's recreational open spaces, and we lived up to our promise in 2004 and 2005. More than 30 fields were built or renovated in the past two years, and 42 additional ball field projects are either under construction or in design. Whenever possible, our fields are reconstructed with natural grass. However, with synthetic turf, sites that were once unmanageable "dust bowls" are now fit for use, and huge asphalt yards have been made safer and more suitable for play. In the past two years, seven former asphalt surfaces were converted into synthetic turf fields. For example, at Robert F. Wagner Playground in East Harlem, a turf field was opened in April, 2005, replacing a sheet of asphalt. Now the site is more than just a plain schoolyard suitable only for limited use at recess. The students have a much better place to play during school hours, and, in addition, the site is also used after school and on weekends by the Harlem RBI Little League.





Park Stewardship

In October, 2003, we joined forces with the City Parks Foundation (CPF) to announce Catalyst Projects for 17 parks in four areas: Highbridge, Astoria & Long Island City, Red Hook, and "Historic" Harlem. CPF raised \$5 million in private funds, and an additional \$20 million in City-funded capital projects was provided for these parks. In 2004 and 2005, our Partnerships for Parks division coordinated funding and resources to encourage volunteer involvement and activism within the communities at large. In Red Hook, we fostered bonds with our existing partners, such as the Friends of Coffey Park, to strengthen our citizens' linkages to their parks.

Over the past four years, we have made a conscious choice not only to expand the parks system but also to expand our outreach to City residents. Without the dedicated support of our partners, our parks would merely be open spaces, rather than centerpieces of their communities. In 2005, more than 55,000 supporters donated their time and money to Parks & Recreation. Thanks to the efforts of volunteers, community activists, good corporate citizens, and our myriad public/private partnerships, our parks are the grounds for organized activities, beautification projects, and a shared sense of belonging to a neighborhood. We are augmenting the efforts of our private partners with innovations, such as the Catalyst Project, that give volunteers a greater sense of ownership and pride in their parks. As our success in Red Hook demonstrates, people who take pride in their neighborhood parks will be the foundation of our expansion for years to come.

In June, 2005, more than 1,500 people were dancing and watching performances in Coffey Park in Brooklyn. Nearby, patrons were playing tennis and running track, and in the Red Hook Recreation Center a local partnership was producing a film series to encourage group discussion. The parks in Red Hook are but one example of the key element of our goal of reconnecting neighbors to improved parks: a sense of partnership between Parks & Recreation and its volunteer supporters. In 2004 and 2005, Parks & Recreation took the next step in the development of Red Hook's parks: It committed funding, and a major program that will emphasize community-based learning, volunteer activities, and revitalization.

Better Management for Better Parks

Our parks system, one of the largest and most complex municipal systems in the nation, currently stands at well over 28,800 acres. Although we are constantly expanding acreage, we can also improve a park visitor's experience through performing routine maintenance. A clean and safe park is one that is filled with children, events, and an atmosphere of serenity.

Parks Inspection Program

We receive daily feedback on the quality of the parks from our Parks Inspection Program (PIP), and in 2005, more inspections than ever were conducted to provide a detailed analysis of the condition and cleanliness of our parks. Inspectors made 4,877 visits in the past year, and they shared their results both with Parks staff and with the general public. Park supervisors and crew chiefs made tens of thousands of additional inspections using the same criteria. Also, 4,842 park users were randomly surveyed so that our staff could hear their concerns. The data were then used to shape and plan regular maintenance work.

Our parks, we are pleased to report, have continued to meet or exceed the Mayor's Management Report's high standards for cleanliness. In both the 2004 and 2005 fiscal years, 87 percent of parks were rated acceptable for their overall condition, and in the most recent study of cleanliness levels 92 percent of parks were rated as acceptable. Safety-related ratings conducted in playgrounds rose from 87 percent to 90 percent, and the ratings for playground safety surfaces remained stable at 89 percent. In August, 2004, a new Comfort Station Inspection Program began a concerted effort to rate and inspect comfort stations citywide for acceptability, and the program has provided immediate results. Three years ago, just 58 percent of our comfort stations were open on a typical day; now, 84 percent are open.

Workforce

We are proud to help our 8 million residents and countless visitors enjoy a more livable city. We have more than 3,000 full-time employees and average approximately 1,750 seasonal staffers,

all affectionately dubbed "Parkies." Our greatest resource in this era of expansion is our "human capital," talented and capable staffers who make the parks a better place.

Parks & Recreation currently runs the largest transitional welfare-to-work program in the country, with a seasonal-high head-count of 3,759 Job Training Participants (JTPs) in fiscal year 2005. While our transitional workers are making the City beautiful, they are also being trained in job skills that they can use to succeed in life. We expanded and improved our program over the past four years, and the number of participants has grown each year, increasing from a weekly average of 2,535 in fiscal year 2004, to 2,700 in fiscal year 2005. JTPs are the backbone of much of our maintenance and operations, and they provide a reliable service in keeping parks well groomed.

Our Parks Opportunity Program's (POP) principal goal is to place JTPs in more long term employment in exchange for service to the City. Career counselors train workers in job skills and find ways to place them in positions that suit their needs. In 2005, POP was approved as an official GED Proctor Program, so participants will be able to sit for their GED exam while they are employed at Parks & Recreation. Many of our participants go on to full-time jobs with major organizations, which in 2005 included North Shore University Hospital, FedEx Kinko's, and Whole Foods. We continue to hear success stories, such as the worker who was noticed by a physician while cleaning a park in Queens; the physician was so taken with the quality of her work that he successfully referred her to his hospital's human resources department.

City Parks Worker (CPW) Bobby Hopkins tends to Manhattan's Riverside Park.



Park Stewardship

As a result of the City's efforts to improve parks, people who enter a park today are more likely to see the friendly face of a Parks employee greeting them. Many different kinds of workers are engaged in the day-to-day life of our parks, from those who keep visitors safe, to those who keep open spaces clean and beautiful, to those who lend a helping hand to newcomers. Here is just a sampling of the people whom you may meet on your next journey into your park:



Above: Members of the Bronx River Alliance and volunteers are transforming the Bronx River. Here, crew members stabilize the riverbank using terracing and planting.

Opposite: Children and adults alike come together in the Clinton Community Garden.

Parks Greeters

First-time visitors to the crowded, world-renowned Coney Island Boardwalk might find a confusing experience. Beginning in 2004, staffers were hired to greet people and explain park rules at Coney Island and other major parks across the City. Parks greeters were recruited from the ranks of former seasonal job-training participants, and the program supplied them with an additional six to nine months of employment while training them to provide on-site customer service. For example, nine greeters were stationed in Coney Island and Kaiser Park. There, they welcomed the 13 million people who visit the area each summer, handed out brochures with lists of local events, directed people to comfort stations and to the open beaches, and, on rainy days, pitched in with general park maintenance.

Neighborhood Parks Initiative

Visitors to City parks in 2006 are likely to be greeted by an impressive horticultural display. Thanks to \$12.5 million from the City Council, \$1.5 million from the Office of the Mayor, and \$750,000 raised in private funds by New Yorkers for Parks, 30 new assistant gardeners were assigned to large neighborhood parks in all five boroughs. City Parks Foundation raised \$100,000 in support of the project, in addition to fostering bonds between the new gardeners and the community. The Central Park Conservancy also contributed the expertise of its staff in the training and oversight process, as well as \$200,000 in equipment. Also, beginning in 2005, 30 of our 135 Playground Associates brought their organized programming expertise for youth and families to the Neighborhood Parks Initiative (NPI) sites. The results have been striking. At Williamsbridge Oval, a park that has at times been a gem hidden even from longtime Bronx residents, flower

beds and manicured shrubs now dot the landscape. Workers at the nearby Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center organize park activities, and ties have been strengthened between the park workers and the Norwood community. The park is scheduled for \$13 million in renovations with funds from the mitigation of the Croton Water Filtration Plant, but it is already on its way to again becoming a neighborhood centerpiece.

Community Gardens

Our community gardens program, under the auspices of GreenThumb, continues to find new properties and dedicated volunteers who are willing to care for them. Today, the GreenThumb program has expanded to more than 500 gardens, including 198 that would otherwise have been developed or destroyed. More New Yorkers than ever are now able to tend their own gardens. We have also recently extended municipal liability protection to our community gardens. Committed gardeners no longer have to shoulder the burden of paying for insurance, and can concentrate on beautifying the land.



Protecting Our Parks

Parks are made both safer and cleaner by enforcing our regulations and protecting our environment. Great strides have been made in defending the parks system through increased enforcement. In the past two years, an influx of Urban Park Rangers and Parks Enforcement Patrol officers has made our parks safer, cleaner, and more active. New programs, such as the GreenApple Corps, provide a wellspring of talented individuals who are committed to bringing an ecologically aware approach to park maintenance.

Mounted PEP officers patrol our parks.

Parks Enforcement

Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) officers have a renewed presence in the parks. Owing to a near-doubling in the ranks of our PEP staff, thanks to the addition of 60 new full-time officers, PEP today has a greater ability to improve the quality of life in our parks and make them safer. We can now deploy a second tour of enforcement officers in those parks where they are most needed. We are also securing playgrounds in neighborhoods where they often become targets of vandalism after closing hours. This promotes greater safety in communities and helps to maintain cleanliness for daytime use.

Ranger Fellows

Our Urban Park Rangers provide a noticeable presence in the parks, owing both to their distinctive appearance and their comprehensive knowledge. Thanks to the Urban Park Ranger Fellowship Program, their ranks have increased dramatically. We hired 64 seasonal rangers to provide programs and stewardship in all five boroughs. For instance, Rangers returned to Fort Greene Park in Brooklyn for the first time in a decade. The Rangers provide a friendly yet authoritative presence in our flagship parks, while sharing their expertise through scheduled educational programs. In 2004 and 2005, more than 50,000 schoolchildren participated in park visits to learn natural science, and more than 145,000 children, adults, and families participated in Ranger programs.

GreenApple Corps

In 2005, we launched the GreenApple Corps, an AmeriCorps program serving New York City. Forty-one Corps members worked in our City's parks and natural areas to provide environmental education, ecological restoration, and urban forestry

management for New Yorkers and their parks. In their first year, they planted more than 2,000 trees and shrubs, led the 2005/2006 NYC Street Tree Census, and instructed more than 2,400 students through hands-on environmental education.

Nature and Visitors Centers

Bronx

Crotona Nature Center
Orchard Beach Nature Center
Pelham Bay Nature Center
Van Cortlandt Nature Center

Brooklyn

Fort Greene Visitors Center
Salt Marsh (Marine Park)
Nature Center

Manhattan

Belvedere Castle (Central Park)
Visitors Center
Dana Discovery Center (Central Park)
Inwood Hill Nature Center

Queens

Alley Pond Adventure Center
Forest Park Visitors Center

Staten Island

Blue Heron Nature Center
High Rock Nature Center
Greenbelt Nature Center



Tree Care



Our parks may be intimate, grand, serene, loud, colorful, pastoral, or just small patches of green in a concrete universe.

However, a park is rarely as appreciated as the tree that is located just outside your front door. We understand the attachment that homeowners, residents, and passersby have to the trees they live with, and we care for our sidewalk forest with great pride.

Above: Trees provide a backdrop for contemplation in Central Park.

Opposite: A bower of flowering Callery pear trees turns a city street into a festival of spring beauty.

Tree Planting and Stewardship

Over the past two years, we have planted 43,607 trees, including 3,302 trees in our parks and 24,292 trees and seedlings by our Natural Resources Group. Approximately 90,000 more trees are scheduled to be planted over the next four years. We also removed 18,021 dead trees, and pruned another 86,560 healthy trees. The neighborhoods that most need tree cover are specifically targeted in our tree-planting and stewardship programs. A comparison of Health Department and Parks Department data found a correlation between high rates of asthma and low tree-canopy cover. In 2001, our New York Tree Trust partnered with Greening for Breathing, a community group in Hunts Point, the Bronx, to develop the Trees for Public Health program. With the help of a grant from the State Department of Environmental Conservation, we inventoried all 889 area street trees, identified more than 1,000 potential planting sites, recruited property owners and residents to act as tree stewards, and established planting priorities. In 2005, we expanded this program to five additional sites, one in each borough. With this further effort, environmental awareness of the impact of trees on a citywide level will be advanced.

Trees and Sidewalks Initiative

Not only are new trees regularly being planted, but New Yorkers are also being given more tools than ever to care for their trees. Our new Trees and Sidewalks program, with funding and aid from the Department of Transportation, was announced by Mayor Bloomberg and the Borough Presidents of the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island in March, 2005. New Yorkers who once had no recourse but to pay private contractors to repave sidewalks damaged by tree roots can now call 3-1-1 and request an inspection. Inspectors quantify the damage to the sidewalk and provide the homeowner with a report and a timeline for repair. Citizens may either have their sidewalks fixed at no cost by the City, or fix the damage themselves with a free City permit. More than 12,000 sites have been inspected and rated, and repair work on hundreds of sites started in 2006.

Tree Census

The 2005/2006 NYC Street Tree Census, conducted on the tenth anniversary of New York City's first tree census, will provide Parks & Recreation with valuable knowledge about the number of trees, as well as their species, size, condition, and distribution across the City. In 2005, we trained 1,282 volunteers to recognize the many varieties of street trees in New York, and also to assess their general health. Working with our GreenApple Corps, our volunteers developed a sense of stewardship for their neighborhood trees, helping to create a core group of citizens who are committed to preserving their natural resources. The new trainees who will promote tree care and education across the City are as important as the knowledge we will obtain from this census.





An Active New York

In the 2003-2004 school year, we began to offer a structured Afterschool program at our recreation centers. Full-time staff members offer programs that range from athletics to arts, providing children aged 6 to 13 with well-rounded, development-oriented programming, and also allowing an hour of assisted homework time each day. For example, at Hunts Point children in the Afterschool programs took trips to the nearby farmers' market to learn about healthful eating in the local community. They were also given a package of learning material to prepare them for school and to ensure that their Afterschool progress continues into the classroom. The program has been so successful that it has been chosen as one of eight Asset Labs in New York City by the YMCA of Greater New York.

Afterschool programs demonstrate the way in which we have expanded our active programming in the past two years to enrich the lives of New Yorkers of all ages. We emphasize a more healthful lifestyle for our visitors, both mentally and physically. New programs train children and adults in exercise routines, more nutritious eating habits, and activities such as learning to swim. We are also engaging New Yorkers and visitors with events, cultural festivities, and works of art.



At the Bronx's Hunts Point Recreation Center, children, teens, adult visitors, and the center's staff unite to improve lives and empower youth. Children are taught to value themselves and their opinions, and are also encouraged to be enthusiastic about education. Staff members report a comprehensive change in their understanding of child development, which in turn enriches the teen programs, Afterschool programs, and the lives of the many children who visit the City's recreation centers at no cost.

Above: Teens at Jackie Robinson Recreation Center participate in the RECYouth Program.

Opposite: A park visitor tries the new, universally accessible playground opened in 2004 on West 70th Street in Manhattan.

Children's Programming

With the new structured program for after-school hours, and an array of new summer programs, Parks & Recreation now provides year-round activities for children. Our range of programming keeps children stay physically active while also providing structured activities during the critical hours after the school day ends. In addition, all of our recreation centers are open and available at no cost to anyone under the age of 18, so that children will have a safe, supervised place to play.

Afterschool Partnerships

With nationwide epidemics of obesity, diabetes, and asthma affecting many children, we have ramped up efforts to reach New York City's kids. Our Afterschool program has blossomed, with more than 2,000 enrolled members meeting daily from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. in 33 of our recreation centers around the City. Youth membership in the Afterschool program has grown by 17 percent in the past year alone. We are also seeking support from other City agencies and the community to help us combat these health problems. For example, we have partnered with the Department of Youth and Community Development in order to provide out-of-school-time (OST) programs at 13 of our Afterschool sites. Funds from the Mayor's Fund to Advance the City of New York have enhanced our Afterschool programs with arts educators and fitness instructors, as well as part-time homework tutors. In 2005, this funding also helped support a fitness-through-athletics program that taught children aged 6 to 13 a variety of structured athletic disciplines. In addition, three of our model sites are funded by a partnership with the Turn 2 Foundation, established by New York Yankee shortstop Derek Jeter. Thanks to their support, the 250 children who are enrolled in these programs can receive training in dance, musical theater, and the visual arts, improve their health in baseball clinics, and attend events in the City.

RECYouth

The RECYouth (Reel Education & Communication for Youth) program gives children and teenagers access to the equipment they need to create multimedia projects. Almost 120 teenagers per week are trained in digital arts production, and they create films and music with collaborative instruction from Parks & Recreation counselors. Each year, a Multimedia Festival is

held, screening films selected by RECYouth participants and providing creative workshops for youth. RECYouth attendees have gone on to become film majors in college, production assistants, and actors in feature films.

Summer Camps

As school lets out each year, Parks Afterschool feeds into our diverse range of children's summer programming. Over the summer, our youth may go on hikes, join day camps, seek adventure tours, take field trips to New York's great cultural and educational landmarks, or even help clean up the City. We offer 27 Summer Day Camp programs for children aged 6 to 13, serving more than 1,800 children citywide. In 2005, we partnered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to offer a Campership program, which provides New York City's children with a chance to explore the majesty of the Catskills and the Adirondacks, all for no charge. Many of these children are from our environmental internship program for high school students, the Ranger Conservation Corps, one of a number of youth programs sponsored by the Butler Foundation. Meanwhile, the Rangers also led an adventure program in Alley Pond Park, where in 2005, more than 425 children attended day programs. Some also went on an overnight camping segment in the park that included a barbecue, a night hike, and stargazing. For many of the young explorers, it was their first experience spending a full night outdoors, all while without ever leaving the City borders.

Opposite: Children at the St. James Recreation Center in the Bronx learn basic martial arts skills.



Fitness

We encourage all New Yorkers to stay fit and, at Parks & Recreation, we ensure that everyone has access to the requisite equipment. Our recreation centers are free for children up to 18 years of age. At these centers, people can swim, bike, run, and register for classes that invigorate their minds and their bodies.

Opposite: Thomas Jefferson Pool is one of 51 outdoor pools that together provide a safe, supervised recreational experience for up to 50,000 people every day, most of them children.

Recreation Centers

In fiscal year 2005, membership at our 34 recreation centers surged by more than 20,000 members to 114,173, thanks in part to the new Chelsea Recreation Center and the restored East 54th Street Recreation Center. The quality of service at each of our centers has also improved, even while we have attracted more members than ever. Thanks to increased awareness and inspections, the out-of-service rate for the centers' fitness equipment dropped from 10 percent in January, 2005, to 2.5 percent by the end of the year.

Soccer Programs

We kicked off the "summer of soccer" in 2005 in an effort to meet the city-wide demand for this growing sport. Our Learn to Play Soccer program attracted 1,100 children, who trained in the basics of the sport. In 2005, children and teens also made 4,500 visits to drop-in competitive leagues held at seven sites citywide. Meanwhile, 150 of our most promising young future goalies and fullbacks participated in the citywide indoor soccer tournament, one of many athletic tournaments sponsored by Parks & Recreation.

City Parks Foundation Sports and Fitness Programs

City Parks Foundation is the only independent nonprofit organization to offer programming in parks throughout the five boroughs. The organization's free sports and fitness programs for young people aged 5 to 16 include instruction in golf, tennis, and track-and-field. In 2006, CityParks Seniors Fitness will be launched at Marine Park, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, and Van Cortlandt Park, offering tennis instruction, yoga lessons, fitness walks, and bike trips to seniors age 60 and over.

Shape Up, New York and Step Out New York City

New Yorkers stay fit by incorporating physical activity into their daily lives. To fight diabetes and other health problems, Shape Up, New York, a joint effort with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DoHMH), was expanded to 14 sites in 2005. It is a comprehensive program that offers courses in both exercise techniques and food preparation, with the help of nutritionists and chefs. Another new summer activity, Step Out New York City, gathers New Yorkers in approximately 80 locations for organized one- to two-mile community walks with a dedicated staff member. Partnering with DoHMH and the NYC Commission on Women's Issues, we train citizens to take literal steps toward a healthful lifestyle. There have already been about 3,600 visits since the program began. These habits and skills gained in a summer can last a lifetime.

Swim Instruction

Our Learn-to-Swim program is a free program that trains children in a fun, physical, and lifesaving activity. In 2005, the number of Learn-to-Swim sites increased from 18 to 33, and summer attendance also reached a new high of 7,920. In the fall of 2005, a complementary program, Swim-to-Safety, was introduced to school-age children in conjunction with the Department of Education's Project Fit Initiative, a program designed to revamp and emphasize physical education in public schools. Swim-to-Safety teaches children how to avoid the risk of drowning when in the water. The swim instruction that we provide for today's youth may lead to tomorrow's New York City lifeguards.





Cultural Events

From a 150-year-old sculpture to a modern outdoor concert, we try to bring the best of the cultural world to New Yorkers. We express both our individual identity and our ethnic pride through arts, music, events, and culture. At Parks & Recreation, we cater both to the tastes of the people who live in our neighborhoods and to tourists who have come to experience the cultural capital of the world.

Special Events

Over the past two years, we issued approximately 6,800 permits events ranging in size from 25 to more than 200,000 participants. Those events included the longstanding New York City Marathon, a dance performance in the stabilized McCarren Pool, and numerous concerts, rallies and festivals. Flushing Meadows-Corona Park alone is host to over 20 large-scale events per year such as the Colombian Independence Day Festival, the Korean Harvest and Folklore Festival, Cinco de Mayo, and the Dragon Boat Festival. And when the evangelist Billy Graham began his final crusade, New York was chosen to accommodate the landmark occasion. More than 250,000 people came to Flushing Meadows-Corona Park for the three-day event, demonstrating the ability of Flushing Meadows and other major parks to provide an iconic backdrop and a safe venue for major public events.

Many of our special events are sponsored, and our staff has worked to create more avenues for corporate philanthropy. In 2004, we formalized the Adopt-A-Park program, which allows sponsors to officially contribute to a specific park or program. In all, more than \$5 million was raised for the City in 2004 and 2005 from events, to the delight of New Yorkers who participated in a wide range of activities.

Public Art

New York City is home to an "outdoor museum," our collection of monuments that are curated in all five boroughs. We take pride in preserving 1,170 monuments, sculptures, and historical markers in the face of harsh weather, human interaction, and the passage of time. In 2004 and 2005, 498 monuments received maintenance, nearly 45 percent of all pieces on view. We added four new pieces to our collection, including a statue of the leader of Mexican independence, *Benito*



Juárez, at Bryant Park. Our restoration of the Washington Square Arch, which includes a striking lighting system, was the winner of the New York Landmarks Conservancy's Lucy G. Moses Award for historic preservation. In addition to our permanent works, we also presented 39 temporary works of art in 2004 and 2005, including the popular *Tom Otterness on Broadway* project, which displayed whimsical sculpture along the Broadway Malls from Columbus Circle to Washington Heights.

Summer Music Festivals

Each summer, beautiful music can be heard emanating from parks across the City. The New York Philharmonic and the New York Metropolitan Opera are among the great partners that provide free outdoor music to all New Yorkers. The City Parks Foundation also organizes 30 free concerts each July and August in all five boroughs. From salsa to jazz and reggae to gospel, these festivals enliven communi-

ties throughout the summer. Scores of other nonprofit groups bring free music, dance, art, theater, and movies to parks all year long.

The Gates

In February, 2005, Central Park was adorned with a historic temporary work of art, *The Gates, Central Park, New York City, 1979-2005*. *The Gates*, a massive project across 23 miles of Central Park's paths, was an immediate international sensation. As conceived by world-renowned New York artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude, the work of art consisted of 7,503 saffron-colored gates with saffron-colored fabric panels, each from 16 to 18 feet tall, that were arrayed throughout the Olmstedian landscape of Central Park. The work stood for 16 days, after which it was dismantled and the materials were recycled. The costs of *The Gates* were borne entirely by the artists, and the work attracted more than 4 million visitors to Central Park, generating an

estimated \$254 million in economic activity for the city. Funds donated by Christo and Jeanne-Claude helped support many City projects, including the hiring of 30 assistant gardeners and 30 playground associates for the Neighborhood Parks Initiative. The full economic impact of *The Gates* was felt not only in areas surrounding Central Park but also in hotels, restaurants and cultural institutions across the City.

Almost 4 million New Yorkers and tourists alike visited *The Gates* over 16 days in February, 2005.



Snaking across the West Side of Lower Manhattan, the hulking High Line had stood rusting for decades. Once an elevated conduit for freight trains, the High Line had fallen into ruin. Recently, however, signs of new life for the old structure have sprung up. A committed group of neighborhood activists had a vision to turn the train tracks into a great public park.

Above: : The former Fresh Kills landfill will be developed into a massive, 2,200-acre public park over the next four decades. Planning, design and community and environmental reviews are all underway.

Right: Equipment is lifted onto the High Line in preparation for its conversion into a park.

New Parks for a New Century

Over the past two years, with the support of elected officials and civic leaders, dreams of a dramatically expanded parks system began to come true. The City acquired the title to the High Line from CSX Transportation in 2005. The abandoned elevated railway will become a magnificent park stretching from Gansevoort Street to 34th Street, overlooking the City streets below. Thanks to the City Council Speaker and the private support of the Friends of the High Line, a section of the High Line that runs from Gansevoort Street to 20th Street will open in 2008.

During the first term of this administration, parkland expansion continued despite economic difficulties and the high cost of land. For example, a vast new park will be built on the site of the former Fresh Kills landfill in Staten Island, transforming the world's largest garbage dump into a glorious 2,200-acre park and natural habitat. In addition, KeySpan sold the former site of the Elmhurst Gas Tanks to the City for \$1, and planning for a new 6-acre park began in 2005. Work continued on Hudson River Park, the Bronx River Greenway, and on the design of the 80-acre Brooklyn Bridge Park to be built between the Manhattan Bridge and Atlantic Avenue. With the population across the City growing rapidly, new parks for new residents are on the drawing boards.





Parks Facts

- 28,855 acres
- 10,000 acres of natural areas
- More than 4,000 individual properties
- More than 2,100 greenstreets
- **990 playgrounds**
- **800 athletic fields**
- 550 tennis courts
- 63 indoor and outdoor pools
- 34 recreation centers
- 13 golf courses
- More than 500 community gardens
- 1,170 monuments
- 22 historic house museums
- 14 nature and visitors centers
- More than 600,000 street trees
- More than 2 million park trees
- 14 miles of beaches
- \$283 million expense budget
(FY06 Adopted)
- \$796 million capital budget
(FY06 Approved September Plan)
- 3,207 full-time employees (FY06 high)
- 3,373 seasonal employees (FY06 high)
- 3,304 job training participants (FY06 high)

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