

INVEST IN PARKS: AN UNDERUSED TOOL TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE



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Hurricane Ida was only the most recent reminder of New York City's vulnerability to climate change.

As NYC grapples with adaptation to severe weather events and sea level rise, our parks system remains an underused tool in our city's fight for greater climate resilience and sustainability.

Resilience is one of the most urgently compelling arguments for more investment in New York's green spaces, along with the array of benefits we know well-funded parks bring to our city -- including healthier communities, equity in the public realm, and economic development.

NYC's parks are integral to our city's landscape, occupying 30,000 acres of land and more than 161 linear miles of its coast. While our parks system could be part of the front line in the long-term resilience of NYC, the parks department is historically neglected by our elected officials. The parks operations budget is chronically underfunded, our parks are riddled with crumbling infrastructure, and our leaders have shown little appetite to build the next generation of great multi-function New York City parks.

The devastation of Ida, coming as we navigate COVID 19 and its variants, should serve as a call to action for New York City's incoming elected leaders that there has never been a more poignant moment to invest in the future vision of this city.

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New Yorkers for Parks' Five Point Plan for Park Equity offer these incoming leaders some pointed suggestions:

1. Commit to a big vision for NYC's parks and open spaces and our public realm, with a focus on open space equity and climate change. Currently many of NYC's open spaces are managed and maintained by a variety of agencies using different standards with no unified vision for the challenges NYC faces.
2. Increase the parks budget to 1% of the city budget and ensure that our city's trees, natural areas and coastlines are safe and well maintained, and our parks remain a resource for all New Yorkers. New York City's parks budget has hovered at just .5% of the overall city budget for decades and our parks have suffered as a result. Most other US cities commit 2-4%.
3. Invest in bold new park ideas to make our coasts more protected, provide more shade, better air, and cooler temperatures...and ensure that all New Yorkers have equitable access to parks and open spaces. NYC has shied away from investing in large parks over the last 8 years, to the detriment of our health and the viability of the city.
4. Commit to tackling the \$6 Billion of deferred parks infrastructure maintenance AND commit to fixing the city's broken capital project system in the process. These steps would help to solve the city's massive drainage problem and turn our parks into stormwater absorbers.
5. Support local open space advocates. No other sector in NYC has more volunteers and dedicated not-for-profit stewards, many of which represent the very neighborhoods that are most threatened by climate change. The city currently makes it difficult for these advocates to dedicate their time and resources to our city's parks.