

SPEAKER ADRIENNE E. ADAMS

State of the City Report Card Initiative

Department of Parks and Recreation

2025



NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
Compliance Division

THE COMPLIANCE DIVISION

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LETTER FROM THE SPEAKER

My fellow New Yorkers:

In my State of the City address last year, I discussed the need for our city government to get back to the basics to fulfill its duty to New Yorkers. Amidst an unequal pandemic recovery that has exacerbated economic hardships, our city is facing the dire affordability challenges of skyrocketing rents, one in four children living in poverty, and a quarter of New Yorkers not being able to afford simple necessities. To meet the core needs of our city, I called for strengthening our municipal government to deliver for all New Yorkers.

The New York City Council is focused on advancing policies and investments that can provide important solutions to our city's challenges. As a co-equal branch of government, our duty is to turn these ideas into effective laws and to conduct oversight of City agencies that ensures they more effectively deliver services to New Yorkers. Oversight and transparency are essential to accountability, which is critical to the health of our city and our democracy. Yet, laws and policies are only as effective as their implementation.

While the Mayor's Management Report provides important data about City agencies, it does not provide a complete picture to the operational performance of agencies or whether they engage in best practices in their delivery of services. This inaugural City Agency Report Card Initiative, which I first introduced as an idea in my 2024 State of the City, begins the Council's work of conducting our own performance evaluations of City agencies in their delivery of services to New Yorkers. These evaluations are the product of extensive research and review of best practices for first-class delivery of government services. Through this Report Card Initiative, the Council will examine how our city's agencies compare to best practices of local government.

Our inaugural City Agency Report Cards examine the Department of Veterans' Services, the Department of Youth & Community Development, and the Department of Parks & Recreation. Using seven pillars of evaluation, the Council identified metrics by which to assess these City agencies. It is my hope that these Report Cards will serve as a tool for government leaders, municipal workers, advocates, and New Yorkers to ensure each agency is using its resources most effectively to be effective and improve. An effective and strong city government is fundamental to confronting our challenges, providing essential services, and delivering on our promise to New Yorkers.

I look forward to advancing the Council's efforts to promote the oversight, transparency, and accountability our city deserves.

Sincerely,



Adrienne E. Adams

Speaker of the New York City Council

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Executive Summary

In April 1870, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) became an official City department. The Department manages one of the largest municipal portfolios of park land in the nation: ranging from swimming pools to beaches, basketball courts, tennis courts, athletic fields, nature centers, recreational facilities, and more than 660,000 street trees. Receiving less than one percent of New York City's \$100+ billion budget, DPR must manage its resources, both people and taxpayer dollars, thoughtfully and strategically. That strategic decision making helps the Department to deliver on its mission to:

grow, maintain, and program a world-class park system prioritizing equity, access, safety, and nature.

In service of that mission, the Department has identified five key value pillars: "nature & environment, equity, cleanliness & safety, health & wellness, and people & culture."

With such a vast array of assets to manage and upkeep, and having to serve all New York City residents and visitors—NYC's population alone is more than 8 million persons—maximizing resources wisely can prove challenging. Compared with other major U.S. cities, the City of New York allocates much less to its parks department. San Francisco spends 1.6 percent of its municipal budget on parks to maintain 4,100 acres of parkland, Los Angeles spends 2.9 percent on 16,000 acres, Chicago 4.3 percent for 9,000 acres, and Minneapolis 5.3 percent for 6,800 acres of parkland. New York City is tasked with maintaining 30,000 acres of parkland, nearly double that of Los Angeles.

Since DPR has a relatively small budget and headcount for the number of users, it serves and the number of assets it manages, the Department often collaborates with non-profit partners for support. In addition to those non-profit partners, DPR often works with fellow City agencies on shared projects, such as Citywide task forces or Citywide initiatives. DPR has entered into 50+ memorandums of understanding over the last 20 years spanning from tree planting on Department of Correction (DOC) sites to expanding and supporting the Department of Education's (DOE) 'Learn to Swim' program.

It must also be recognized that while DPR indicated that it understands and sees itself as committed to maintaining open and transparent communication with parks users, relevant advocates, stakeholders, and other partners, had a more mixed sentiment, reflecting a myriad of issues facing the agency. Many shared with the Council that they feel their ability to successfully work with DPR has been impacted by budget cuts and staffing shortages. DPR is still grappling with the impact of Fiscal Year 2025's \$20 million reduction, as compared to the Fiscal Year 2024 adopted budget, and a hiring freeze equivalent to the loss of almost 1,000 employees.

It is time for the City to prioritize the Parks Department with the funding necessary in order for it to properly and effectively meet its mission. New York City can deliver world-class park experiences as shown by flagship parks that are the jewels of the City, but City Hall needs to view DPR as an essential agency with the proper funding to ensure that this world-class standard is shared equitably across the five boroughs.

Learn About Our Grading Process

| Grade | Additional Comments |
|---|--|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Blue Ribbon Agency ▪ Exceptional performance and capability ▪ Agency prioritizes continuous improvement with a systematic approach to implementation and evaluation of agency programs, goals, etc. ▪ Evidence of systematic and regular internal assessments of performance and/or capability gaps |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive performance and capability ▪ Extensive evidence of continuous improvement activities ▪ Widespread evidence of internal assessments of performance and/or capability gaps |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adequate performance and capability ▪ Some evidence of continuous improvement activities ▪ Sufficient evidence of internal assessments of performance and/or capability gaps ▪ Internal processes need improvement |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inconsistent performance and capability ▪ Evidence of early stages of continuous improvement activities ▪ Limited evidence of internal assessments of performance and/or capability gaps ▪ Internal processes need urgent improvement |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Concerning levels of agency performance and capability ▪ Little to no evidence of an agency's commitment to continuous improvement ▪ Little to no internal awareness or knowledge of performance and/or capability gaps |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Insufficient evidence available to make a credible assessment |

To learn more about methodology and process, please refer to Appendix A and B.

Grade



City of New York
Parks & Recreation

Department of Parks & Recreation



Final Report Card

B

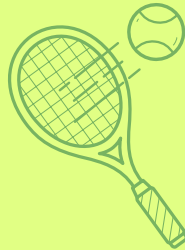
| PILLAR | GRADE | INDICATORS |
|---|-------|-----------------------------------|
| Leadership, Strategy, and Direction | C | Leadership and Governance B |
| | | Strategy Development C |
| | | Strategy Implementation C |
| Service Delivery for New Yorkers | B | Equity B |
| | | Access B |
| | | Meeting Demand C |
| Relationships and Collaboration | B | Stakeholder Engagement B |
| | | Institutional Engagement B |
| Workforce Development | B | Staff Capacity C |
| | | Staff Development A |
| Digital Government | B | Strategic Approach B |
| | | Policy Levers B |
| | | Implementation B |
| | | Monitoring B |
| Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management | B | Reporting and Data Availability B |
| | | MMR Review and Evaluation B |

Department of Parks and Recreation

Data About Parks



1,800
Basketball
Courts



550
Tennis
Courts



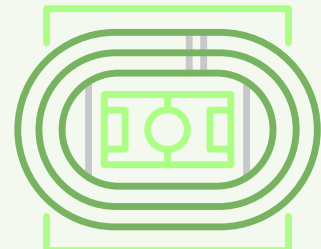
65
Swimming
Pools



51
Recreational
Facilities



15
Nature
Centers



800+
More than 800
Athletic Fields



14
Miles of
Beaches

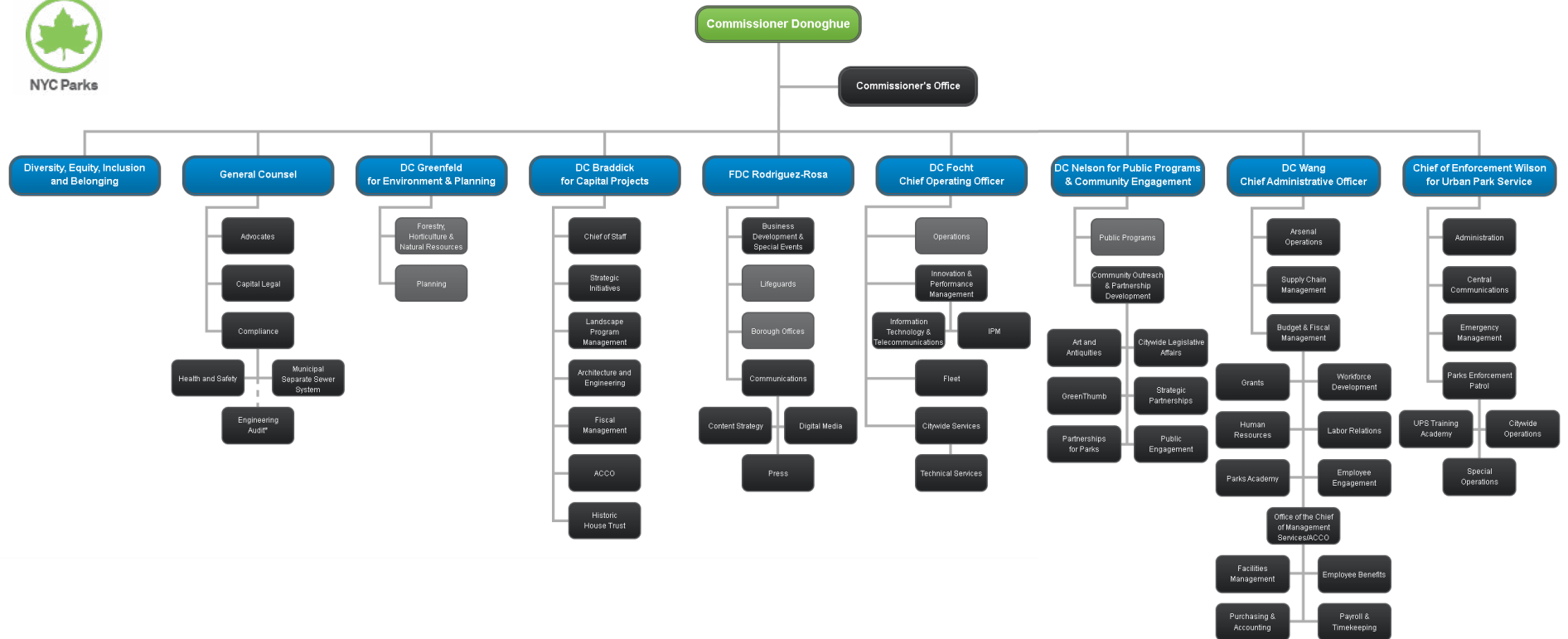


660,000+
More than
660,000 Street Trees



14%
of NYC (more than
30,000 acres) is
Parkland

Parks Organizational Chart



Introduction

New York City's Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) became an official City department in April 1870 and is under the purview of the New York City mayor. DPR has grown immensely throughout its time as a City agency: from the first official park, Bowling Green Park, being established in 1733; acquiring Central Park in 1856; appointing its first all-borough commissioner in 1934; and launching its own Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Office in 2022.^{1,2} The agency now manages 14 percent of the city's land—around 30,000 acres—ranging from Coney Island, Pelham Bay Park, community gardens, and cemeteries. The agency operates playgrounds, basketball courts, public pools, athletic fields, nature centers, recreational centers, golf courses, tennis courts, and miles of beach across the five boroughs.³

Mission and Vision

DPR's mission is “to grow, maintain, and program a world-class park system prioritizing equity, access, safety, and nature.” In alignment with its mission, DPR's vision is “to create and sustain a restorative and thriving park system for all.” In service of these goals, DPR has listed five key value pillars: “nature & environment, equity, cleanliness & safety, health & wellness, and people & culture.”⁴

Services and Infrastructure

DPR provides a wide range of free or low-cost events, recreational programming, and infrastructure that supports New York City residents. The events and services provided include concerts in the park, Movies Under the Stars,⁵ theater performances, history and nature tours, kayaking, community gardening, and fitness classes, all of which are open to both New York City residents and visitors of any age.⁶ Residents and visitors can also obtain a recreation center membership, which provides year-round access to swim lessons, youth sports programs, instructional clinics, media education programming, and summer camps.⁷ Some services and recreational programming are delivered directly through the agency, while others are delivered indirectly through agency collaborations with non-profit partners or volunteer groups.⁸

The Department is tasked with the planning, designing, and construction of various parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities across the city.⁹ The Capital Projects Division within DPR oversees the implementation of capital improvements, ensuring that such projects align with the City's broader goals of sustainability, accessibility, nature preservation, and urban resilience.¹⁰ This division manages the redesign of existing features, as well as the construction of new parks, and has completed myriad projects across all boroughs, ranging from reforestation; sidewalk reconstruction; and green infrastructure construction.¹¹ The process of completing these projects includes community engagement, project scoping, design review, procurement, and construction management. Through the Capital Projects Division, DPR maintains and enhances the city's green infrastructure, providing support for the preservation and expansion of New York City's public spaces.

Structure & Resources

DPR operates under Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, appointed by Mayor Eric Adams on June 1, 2025 (Sue Donoghue served as Commissioner from Feb 4, 2022 until May 31, 2025).^{12,13,14} The Commissioner is supported by a First Deputy Commissioner and five Deputy Commissioners who oversee various departments within the agency. The Department identified nine divisions, which house a number of specific sub-divisions. Since the writing of this report, DPR has changed its website from a dedicated page titled “People,” which outlined its various divisions and divisional leadership, to a new page titled “Leadership at NYC Parks,” which only lists the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners.

For Fiscal Year 2026, DPR’s Adopted budget was \$687.6 million¹⁵—representing 0.6 percent of the City’s FY26 Adopted Budget of \$115.9 billion. DPR’s FY26 Adopted budget also included a budgeted headcount of 5,034 full-time positions. For FY25, DPR’s Adopted budget was \$618.1 million¹⁶—representing roughly 0.5 percent of the City’s total budget and a \$20.1 million decrease from the agency’s Fiscal 2024 Adopted Budget. DPR’s Fiscal Year 2026 Adopted budget includes 5,034 full-time positions, 584 more positions than the Fiscal Year 2025 Adopted Budget. Roughly 61.4 percent of DPR’s headcount, 3,091 positions, will be allocated to maintenance and operations throughout the five boroughs making up the largest portion of the agency’s staff.¹⁷ The rest of the agency’s budgeted headcount will be divided between Recreation, Urban Park Service, Forestry and Horticulture, Capital, and Administration.¹⁸

Relationships & Collaboration

DPR partners with more than 60 non-profits and 500 volunteer groups to carry out programming and handle varying degrees of park management.¹⁹ Advocates and conservancies collaborate with DPR to handle maintenance, construction, preservation, horticulture, and other tasks DPR believes its partners are equipped to handle based on licensing agreements.²⁰

LEADERSHIP, STRATEGY, AND DIRECTION

The Leadership, Strategy, and Direction pillar focuses on the capability of the agency's leadership to properly steer the agency and prepare for the future. This review evaluates how the executive team and the agency as a whole develop, implement, and adhere to its mission, vision, values, and strategies.

In this section:

- *Leadership and Governance*
- *Strategy Development*
- *Strategy Implementation*

| Pillar | Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review | Rating |
|-------------------------------------|---|--------|
| Leadership, Strategy, and Direction | Leadership and Governance | B |
| | Strategy Development | C |
| | Strategy Implementation | C |

Leadership and Governance

Agency Strategy

Leadership and governance are important in local government for guiding strategy, policy and programmatic direction, and for ensuring that available resources are being used effectively. Leadership also helps in determining how to set out the nature and scope of an agency's strategic objectives in enough detail to encourage implementation and to ensure that its chosen strategic direction is being communicated effectively to the general public. In the context of this review, and agencies' strategic plans, 'strategic priorities' refer to the strategic objectives an agency intends to achieve or contribute to for the period to which a strategic plan relates.

The city of New York has more than 8 million residents and an annual fiscal budget exceeding \$100 billion dollars. Within this, DPR plays a vital role as a department mandated under Chapter 21 of the New York City Charter.²¹ Among other powers, the City Charter confers upon the DPR Commissioner, as head of the Department, broad authority to prepare plans in relation to the City's parks and recreation system. This authority enables the preparation of plans on matters including: the City's park system, listed conservation, environmental, nature, and preservation matters; trees (and other plantings) and works of art (as defined); facilities for recreation of the public; and recreation programs for the public.²² DPR's authority to spend public money also creates an obligation to account for how it intends to achieve its mandates. Currently, this obligation is monitored through Citywide accountability mechanisms, which guide DPR in communicating its intended strategic direction. These include:

- DPR's communication of its 'vision and mission' through its official website, online media, and indirectly using non-digital mechanisms including flyers and word-of-mouth promotion.^{23,24}
- DPR's strategic priorities outlined in strategic documents completed pursuant to DPR's Charter-mandated authority.
- Information on DPR's performance provided annually as part of the Mayor's Management Report (MMR), as required by the City Charter.²⁵
- Information on DPR's capital planning provided every 10 years as part of the Ten-Year Capital Strategy (TYCS) as required by the City Charter.²⁶
- Information DPR provides in City Council oversight and budget hearings held throughout the year, including requirements under the MMR.

- Individual reporting requirements, such as reporting on strategies to reduce the duration of capital projects, production of the Urban Forest Plan, requirements pursuant to Open Data laws, language access implementation, and accessibility plans, among others.
- Indirectly, through internal interagency input on departmental progress to assist the Mayor in meeting obligations such as Sections 5 and 17 requirements under Chapter 1 of the City Charter, to produce an annual policy statement, and the strategic policy statement, respectively.²⁷

Together, these form a vital accountability framework helping the Administration, City Council, and the general public to better understand agency performance, and how well each agency is set up to achieve its strategic priorities. DPR relies on these mechanisms to communicate its intended strategic direction.

The Council heard from a number of advocates and relevant stakeholders on DPR's efforts.²⁸

The Council acknowledges DPR's ongoing efforts, particularly over the last few years, to continue communicating effectively with relevant partners, the Council, and the general public—within its recognized capabilities and budgetary constraints. Noting this, while existing accountability mechanisms remain useful for guiding DPR in its communication efforts, regular and more clearly defined strategic priorities could assist the Department in reaching the general public, building public confidence, and helping the Department and the Administration better define DPR's, and the City's goals.

Strategy Development

Strategic development refers to an agency's processes in determining strategic direction. Effective strategic development improves strategic planning by encouraging agencies to better articulate how they intend to align their strategic priorities with measurable objectives to meet their desired outcomes. When creating strategies, agencies should use reliable, relevant, independent, and up to date information from across City government to ensure that the chosen direction meets the needs of the community.²⁹

Aside from its general powers, DPR does not have a duty to produce an overarching strategic plan giving the Department some discretion in establishing its strategic priorities within the City's wider framework and through existing accountability mechanisms.

Since June 1, 2025, Iris Rodriguez-Rosa has served as the Department's Commissioner (Sue Donoghue served as Commissioner from February 4, 2022 until May 31, 2025). Under former-Commissioner Donoghue's leadership, DPR promotes equity and sustainability as top priorities.³⁰ For this review, DPR identified three documents as examples of its long-term strategic plans:³¹

1. Launched in June 2024, "Vital Parks for All: Investing in NYC's Living Infrastructure" (Vital Parks for All) a plan aimed to equitably strengthen the health, environment, and communities through the parks system.
2. A Tree Risk Management approach adopted by DPR's Forestry Division in 2017.
3. A Natural Areas Strategic Trails Plan by DPR's Natural Resources Group in conjunction with the Natural Areas Conservancy, Inc., an environmental nonprofit connecting people to New York City nature and parks by increasing access, education, and jobs.

In addition, DPR contributes towards various Citywide strategic initiatives with specific Department divisions also having varying responsibilities in setting and maintaining their individual division initiatives.³²

In reviewing DPR's strategic development, the Council received feedback from the Department and from parks advocates and stakeholders through roundtables and survey responses. The Department's feedback indicates an understanding of its role in setting strategic direction and on the importance of ensuring that its chosen direction remains adaptable to the Administration's sometimes shifting Citywide priorities.³³ DPR's responses also indicated an acceptable level of coordination within the Department in its use of data and internal feedback to guide its prioritizations with sometimes limited resources. As noted, the City's budget process acts as an accountability mechanism for agencies to identify and outline their intended priorities. DPR's responses in this regard also indicated an awareness of the importance of receiving feedback from non-profit partners and the general public in establishing those priorities.

In addition to internal coordination and goal setting, transparency and accountability in strategic development also help agencies to ensure that chosen strategies accurately align with public expectations.^{34,35} As noted in this review's digital government analysis, agency websites are a critical resource for communicating strategies to the general public. The New York City Office of Technology and Innovation (OTI) City User Experience Design Guidelines, for example, note that an agency's website should deliver timely, reliable, official, accessible, and authoritative information.

Within this context, it was found that DPR's website does not provide clear and consistent information on the Department's strategic direction; a view shared by a majority of advocates and stakeholders in this review. Notably, the website landing page prominently links to the Vital Parks for All plan, with the "Leadership in Parks" landing page also including information on this plan and its significance to DPR's strategic framework. However, the "Vision and Mission" landing page reveals no reference to this plan. Less consistently, on the "Parks" page, "Planning and Building Parks" prominently identifies Vital Parks for All, while "Planning Overview" links to the

“Framework for an Equitable Future” landing page—described as a current plan.

The Framework for an Equitable Future was a strategic plan released in fall 2014 under the previous de Blasio Administration. This plan was also identified in DPR’s feedback as a part of the Department’s previous strategic framework prior to Vital Parks for All. Yet, the Framework for an Equitable Future landing page links to “Citywide Priorities and Interagency Planning”, which still notes that the planning work being done is “...an essential part of [former] Mayor Bill de Blasio’s City-wide effort to prioritize the growth of economic opportunity, social equity and livable neighborhoods.” Online and site-specific searches of the DPR website also revealed that the Framework for an Equitable Future and Vital Parks for All appear interchangeably with no clear discernment as to the Department’s intended strategic direction. DPR must work to identify and clarify its strategic direction through its website by ensuring that it maintains reliable and up to date information.

Except for a release date at the head of each report, neither plan clearly identifies the period to which the information relates. Although each plan identifies its strategic priorities, there is insufficient information to discern how those measures will be achieved and minimal timeframes to facilitate an understanding of when or how the Department intends to achieve each listed initiative. In terms of strategic development, this lack of articulation risks disincentivizing engagement from the public in learning how DPR intends to use its public resources to set and meet its strategic aims.

A majority of parks advocates and stakeholders noted a lack of transparency in understanding how DPR establishes its strategic priorities and a perceived top-down approach to strategic planning and decision making. These perceptions notably differed from the Department’s assessment of the positive role stakeholder meetings play in reviewing plans to ensure their continued relevance. This inconsistency highlights the importance of working to continuously improve transparency and accountability in strategic planning. A clearer framework for strategic development would benefit the Department.

Advocates and stakeholders similarly noted concerns with the Department’s wider strategic planning framework, with some advocates suggesting that a multi-year strategic approach could help DPR to better articulate its strategic, workforce, and budgetary needs, especially in light of perceived budgetary, resourcing and staffing constraints. An effective strategy should also be readily identifiable and clearly set out its strategic objectives with measures to achieve them.

As noted, DPR’s strategic approach is currently articulated through multiple accountability mechanisms including its websites, City Council hearings, existing reporting obligations, the MMR, and its current overarching strategic plan Vital Parks for All.

The Council’s findings indicate that the Department could do more to clarify its strategic priorities and direction. There is an opportunity for DPR, through its strategic plan, to expand on its strategic vision through a clearer framework. This framework should report regularly, identify the period to which the information relates, and set out each strategic priority with a timeline and the details necessary to enable an understanding of how its objectives will be achieved. Reviews of existing frameworks in other jurisdictions,^{36,37} suggest that this could give DPR an opportunity to routinely review its strategic intentions and improve accountability for its priorities over each review period. This would benefit the Department, the Administration, the Council, and the general public.

The Department would benefit by having a set of identified strategic priorities over a multi-year period to provide context to information provided through mandatory reporting in the MMR. For example, it would enable DPR to expand on the resourcing it needs to achieve its vision, particularly with multi-year projects, and by setting out in simple narrative form, how it intends to achieve existing goals with available resources.

The Administration would benefit by having access to clearer regular reporting on DPR’s organizational health, e.g. how well DPR it is setting itself up to identify issues, establish goals, and articulate solutions. This

The Compliance Division on three separate occasions asked the Mayor's Office of City Legislative Affairs for the Charter mandated strategic policy statement. As of the writing of this report, the Administration has failed to produce the policy statement.

would aid the Administration in understanding the City's most significant long term issues, and help the Mayor to meet various responsibilities, including the Administration's Charter-mandated strategic policy statement required every four years;³⁸ the ten-year capital strategy that must consider the strategic policy statement;³⁹ and the MMR. Distinct from those statements, reports, and strategies, the Department would articulate its overarching strategic priorities and capabilities to better inform other Citywide plans and mandates to help align the Department's objectives to the City's wider priorities.

Finally, the Council and the public would benefit from clearer public programmatic evaluation. This would assist stakeholders' understanding of DPR's needs over a multi-year period providing context to information in the MMR and other reporting mechanisms through DPR's articulation of its use of public funds in the medium term. This would help to improve trust and confidence in the Administration and improve accountability during the budget process.

"STATEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY TO IMPROVE AGENCY ACCOUNTABILITY"

In the government context, a 'statement of responsibility' is a form of declaration, often by an individual or an agency, certifying their responsibility for the information being presented. A statement of responsibility is important for public sector transparency and accountability to assure the integrity of the information by demonstrating that the declarer has used their judgment in producing the information. While this review does not directly address the merits of legislative mandates for regular strategic reporting, agency leaders have a role in publicly guiding agency performance, regulatory compliance, strategic direction and delivery. There is an opportunity for leaders to build public confidence by including a statement of responsibility. The purpose would be to hold leadership accountable for the strategy outlined through a public statement signed by the head of the agency that they consider the information to be in accordance with their responsibilities or, with relevant legislation. This would help to further improve transparency and accountability for the agency's strategic direction and performance."

Strategy Implementation

Strategic implementation looks at how agencies give effect to their strategic priorities. Strategic implementation is most effective if/when agencies can find ways to closely link them with the intended strategic priorities, and when there is an embedded culture of continuous improvement to strategic planning.^{40,41}

As noted, DPR has broad authority to determine how it implements its overarching strategic direction, unlike with other requirements such as the five-year accessibility plan and language access implementation plan, which must be produced in accordance with their respective provisions in the City's Administrative Code.⁴² For this assessment, DPR's three identified long-term plans and accompanying publicly available information were considered in light of feedback received from the Department, advocates, stakeholders and other organizations.

Beyond the City's broad accountability mechanisms, larger agencies formulate a range of strategies in meeting the needs of various internal sub-divisions and those of the community. DPR's overarching strategic framework is monitored by its Chief Strategy Officer, while departmental initiatives are managed and monitored by staff, within their respective divisions.⁴³ Operationally, DPR identified nine divisions, which house a number of specific sub-divisions.⁴⁴ Yet notably, DPR's "Table of Organization"—a snapshot received from DPR on its current departmental structure—measurably differs from divisions identified on the Department's official website.^{45,46} Lack of organizational clarity can hinder the general public from understanding an agency's internal strategic resource allocations. To address this, DPR should aim to improve transparency by better communicating through its provision of its strategic priorities on how it intends to direct specific sub-divisions to achieve or contribute to their relevant strategic priorities.

The Department acknowledges the importance of implementing strategies, while remaining flexible to internal and Citywide priorities.⁴⁷ Notably, however, neither DPR (through its three identified strategic plans), nor advocates and stakeholders could articulate the connection between the agency's core functions and responsibilities in giving effect to specific strategic priorities. Aside from when planning frameworks require it—when language access and accessibility plans outline how such plans are to be structured—DPR does not identify how its strategic priorities stem from the Department's functions or responsibilities in a structured way.

Some advocates accepted DPR's inherent difficulties in communicating vast amounts of information, noting for example that while DPR generally makes information available, the challenge is in members of the public knowing how to find it. DPR's website was found to contain multiple overviews of the Department's vision. At the same time, strategic planning can be improved when information clearly identifies why an agency exists, and how it intends to set its strategic objectives to ensure that its priorities are the best use of its resources. This articulation can help agencies in assessing their approach in light of their functions and resources. This improves the general public's ability to connect the agency's role with its strategic priorities. To improve accountability, DPR should consider working to consolidate its strategic approach by including an explanation of what the Department's functions and responsibilities are and then linking those to how it intends to manage those functions to meet its strategic priorities.

While DPR has experienced a decline in funding over the last few years, the FY26 Preliminary Budget is greater than the FY25 Adopted Budget.⁴⁸ However, feedback from advocates and stakeholders, on prior declines in funding, have noted its effects in addressing needs including equity and accessibility issues, funding of capital projects, and understaffing concerns. As identified by DPR and acknowledged by advocates and agency partners, DPR is dedicated to orientating its vision and mission to improving access to parks despite such constraints. At the same time, and as this report notes, neither the Vital Parks for All project nor existing measures in the MMR adequately set out whether DPR is likely to have the capabilities to achieve its intended key performance indicators or its high level strategic priorities. To address this, DPR and the general public, would benefit from the Department setting out through its provision of its strategic priorities clearer information sufficient to enable an understanding on how DPR's capabilities will enable, or not enable, it to meet its intended strategic priorities. In addition to the existing accountability mechanism noted, this would provide DPR with an opportunity to explain its current strategic and operational context. For example, if the Department can show how it is anticipating citywide constraints, economic and fiscal issues, and any other wider factors, it would better inform the Administration in understanding substantive issues preventing the Department from achieving its intentions.

Another benefit with providing clearer information to the Administration is to enable it to better identify citywide priorities in meeting its own responsibilities. Advocates' feedback suggest a perceived disconnect between the City's understanding of the Department's budgetary needs, and in support from the Administration in incorporating DPR's vision into a strong citywide strategy. Specifically, advocates noted a lack of Mayoral vision inhibiting DPR's ability to incorporate its vision into a strong citywide strategy.

“Prior to assuming office, Mayor Adams pledged to increase DPR funding by moving to allocate 1% of the city budget to Parks. However, current funding only equals .6% of the city budget—a percentage that has remained stagnant throughout his three years as mayor.”⁴⁹

While recognizing DPR's constraints within the wider Administrative system, DPR could benefit from outlining as a matter of course through its provision of its strategic priorities an explanation of all responsibilities that DPR has to the Mayor, or any other agencies, in relation to its intended operations and to connect those with its strategic priorities for period to which the information relates. Together with this information, DPR should also consider clearly identifying in each strategic plan, all City agencies, stakeholders, and any other public or private organizations the Department intends to coordinate with to achieve or contribute

to its strategic priorities. These measures would help DPR to better define its role, and that of other agency and non-agency parties, as the Department implements its strategic priorities.

SERVICE DELIVERY FOR NEW YORKERS

The Service Delivery for New Yorkers pillar encompasses the accessibility, inclusivity, and availability of all agency services. This review measures how well the agency is accounting for and meeting the needs of the community using the resources available to the agency.

In this section:

- *Equity*
- *Access*
- *Meeting Demands*

| Pillar | Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review | Rating |
|----------------------------------|---|--------|
| Service Delivery for New Yorkers | Equity | B |
| | Access | B |
| | Meeting Demand | C |

Service delivery is integral to DPR's core agency functions relating to how constituents directly engage with City parks and facilities, DPR's role in organizing events and programs, DPR's permit system, and how the agency maintains its ongoing relationships with stewards and other volunteers.

Equity

Information Accessibility and Outreach Efforts

For organizations to ensure they are creating inclusive and equitable public services and resources, clear and plain language should be used in all organizational communication to reduce barriers to access and ensure the entire target population can understand all communication.⁵⁰

New York City Local Law 30 of 2017 requires that all City agencies that provide direct public services must incorporate plain language principles in place of technical, legal, or specialized terms for commonly distributed documents containing important information regarding basic services and for other public communications.⁵¹ The New York City Digital Blueprint follows the federal government's plain language guidelines, which defines plain language as communication an audience can understand the first time they read or hear it.⁵² Best practices for plain language writing include keeping text at or below an eighth-grade reading level, using short sentences, keeping text simple and avoiding complex words, and frontloading important information.⁵³ Using plain language makes information more accessible for people with limited English proficiency or cognitive disabilities.⁵⁴

"Plain language is not 'dumbed down' writing—it's a way of writing that makes text easier for all readers to understand."⁵⁵

When DPR was asked about plain language protocols, the Department responded that they always encourage staff writers to produce communication that can be clearly read and understood. The agency facilitates internal plain language editing processes and requires that agency employees, specifically anyone who works in a customer-facing role, attend a Voice and Tone workshop. They also provide plain language resources to help employees better understand and implement it in their work, as well as embracing plain language as part of the agency's brand guidelines. Below is an example of the agency's use of plain language pulled from the Tennis at NYC Parks website page and provided to the Council:

How to Play:

A permit is needed to use an outdoor court from the first Saturday in April to the Sunday before Thanksgiving. Full-season permits for adults, ages 18 to 61, only cost \$100 a year, and discounts are available for seniors, kids, and teens.

You can purchase a new tennis permit online, or if you have purchased a permit in the past, you can easily renew your permit.

The above messaging from DPR uses simple language and short sentences adhering to the City's Digital Blueprint. A review of DPR's website also shows widespread use of simple language and short sentences—making it clear the agency does its best to employ plain language throughout its communications.⁵⁶

When DPR contractors, non-profit partners, and advocates were surveyed about whether the agency used clear language that could be understood by its entire target population, only 18 percent of those surveyed disagreed with the statement. Almost two-thirds of respondents agreed that DPR uses clear language accessible to all individuals indicating that the agency effectively uses clear and plain language across its communications.⁵⁷

Local Law 30 of 2017 also requires the agency to provide language access services for all designated Citywide languages, including translating documents containing essential information regarding basic City services or enforcement of agency rules, so that individuals with limited English proficiency can understand agency communications.⁵⁸

DPR's Language Access Plan states that the agency will provide appropriate parks signage for designated languages, offer flyers and all other printed materials in multiple languages, and adjust services as necessary to meet language access demand.⁵⁹ The agency's website is also easily translatable into 200+ languages by clicking the 'Translate' button that sits atop each website page.⁶⁰ However, any form linked on the website, such as the Recreation Center Membership Registration Form, is only available for download in English and must be manually translated to a different language.

In addition to ensuring organizational communication is written in clear and plain language, organizations must also provide information and conduct outreach through both non-digital and digital mechanisms. It is acknowledged that a portion of users, particularly older users, will always be unable or reluctant to adopt digital mechanisms thus making it essential to provide non-digital information and outreach to create an inclusive and equitable public service design process.⁶¹

When DPR was asked what outreach they do to reach park users who prefer non-digital mechanisms or lack access to technology, the response was minimal. The Department replied that their main forms of traditional outreach are comprised of flyers and word-of-mouth promotion from their instructors and patrons. The agency noted that much of its communication is done digitally—routinely using social media, its website, or its membership management system to communicate new or updated information.⁶²

Survey participants had mixed responses when asked about DPR's attempts to target parks users with limited access to technology. More than half of participants were unable to give a clear answer, either remaining neutral or choosing to answer N/A, potentially due to a lack of knowledge in this area. Only 18 percent

felt the agency effectively targeted individuals with limited digital access, while 29 percent opposed the statement, feeling the agency could improve in this area. Although the responses are varied, the portion of participants who feel the agency's outreach is not inclusive of individuals who lack technology access suggests that DPR may be missing a subset of that group—however small it may be.

Taking into consideration that the agency's target audience is quite large, all NYC residents and visitors, and that its budget is less than one percent of the city-wide budget, it is likely limited in its ability to provide non-digital outreach. Certain non-digital outreach methods, like mailers, would be almost impossible for them to implement due to the size of their target audience and cost of the method.

Service and Resource Inclusivity

The OECD identifies inclusivity as a key aspect of people-centric services: meaning that for an organization to ensure all services and programming are people-centered, they must be accessible to all segments of the targeted population.⁶³

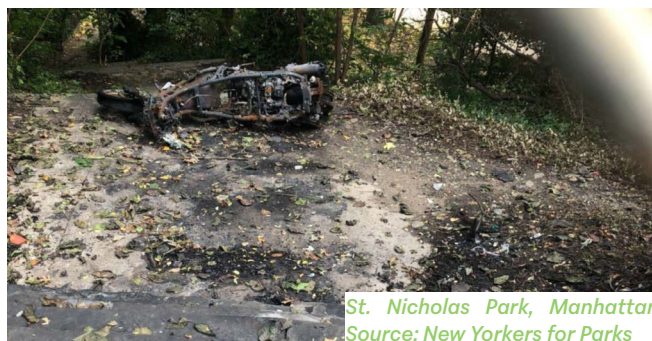
Since DPR serves all NYC residents and visitors, the Department does its best to ensure that all programs, services, and facilities they provide are accessible to everyone. While some programs have age limitations, like the agency's summer camps and youth swim teams, most services and programs have no restrictions and are available to anyone who is interested.⁶⁴ All recreational facilities, including parks, outdoor pools, playgrounds, tennis courts, and recreation centers are also open to all NYC residents and visitors.⁶⁵

Although the agency has made efforts to ensure all programming, services, and facilities are completely inclusive, 70 percent of advocates and agency partners that participated in the survey feel that the current distribution of parks and facilities is inequitable.

An advocate responded that “[t]he administration is not funding the agency and the result is deeply inequitable parks and open space. Wealthier areas of the city have better parks, period. And that is because those communities have the capacity to raise private dollars.”



Harlem River Park, Manhattan
Source: New Yorkers for Parks



St. Nicholas Park, Manhattan
Source: New Yorkers for Parks

The Department is aware of this issue and is working to combat this through the Community Parks Initiative (CPI), an equity-driven parks investment program created in 2014.⁶⁶ This initiative focuses on redesigning and transforming parks in densely populated neighborhoods with higher-than-average levels of poverty that have received little to no capital investment over the last few decades. So far, the Community Parks Initiative has transformed 67 parks in under-resourced neighborhoods across all five boroughs. Additionally, there are currently 22 active projects in the design, procurement, or construction phase and funding for 20 more sites was announced in January 2024.^{67,68}

In addition to ensuring that organizational programming is completely inclusive, organizations must also guarantee that their programming offers operating hours that accommodate both standard and non-standard work schedules.⁶⁹

When the agency was asked how they maintain inclusive operating hours, the agency responded “we do our best to implement staffing patterns to provide flexible operating hours for all New Yorkers. We open early and close late where staffing allows.”⁷⁰ DPR provides several services and programs both directly through the agency and in partnership with other organizations, such as theater performances, fitness classes, movie showings, history tours, youth sports, media classes, and swim lessons, all of which have varying operating hours. Programs geared toward kids, like youth sports or Kids in Motion⁷¹, operate throughout weekday mornings, afternoons, evenings, and all weekend long. Other services, such as movie showings or concerts, typically take place in the afternoon or evening. Although these are just a few DPR’s services and programs, many of their offerings are available throughout all weekday and weekend hours covering standard and non-standard work schedules.^{72,73}

The agency also has recreation centers throughout all five boroughs that provide media lessons, swim lessons, and access to gymnasiums, weight rooms, and libraries. Most recreation centers are open morning to early evening during the weekdays and morning to early afternoon on Saturdays giving parks users a wide range of hours in which to use the recreation centers. Although recreation center hours can be affected due to construction, the agency does their best to ensure each borough always has operating centers that maintain regular hours.⁷⁴

Access

Geographic Service Accessibility

Certain factors, like location, can impact whether an organization’s services and programming are accessible to its target population.⁷⁵ The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), a leading organization on parks and recreation, identifies convenience as an essential element of a safe route to a park, which is important for ensuring park accessibility. The NRPA defines convenience as the proximity of park routes to residents’ homes, stating that the route to a park should be no longer than a ½ mile, or a 10-minute walk, from where people reside.⁷⁶ This is widely accepted as the industry standard for a walkable distance with an acknowledgment that this distance and time threshold will vary based on the age, ability, and preferences of community residents.⁷⁷

The Journal of Park and Recreation Administration—with support from the National Park Service (NPS), the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, North Carolina State University, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—conducted research to understand potential health measures related to public parks and trails. Their research found that increased proximity to trails and greenways correlates to improved mood and physical activity, and high-quality, traffic-free routes for walking, running, and biking can help to increase an individual’s overall physical activity.⁷⁸ These findings suggest that proximity to parks is not only important for accessibility but also for health and well-being.

DPR has instituted a Walk to a Park initiative that focuses on increasing access to parks and public spaces with an emphasis on under-resourced communities. The agency has defined walking distance as a ½ mile or less for larger parks, around eight acres or more, and a ¼ mile or less for small playgrounds and sitting areas.⁷⁹ Results from the initiative are reported annually in the MMR. The FY24 MMR states that 83.9 percent of New Yorkers live within walking distance to a park; a figure that has increased by 2.2 percent since FY20.⁸⁰ DPR has collaborated with multiple city agencies, [LIKE THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ON THE SCHOOLYARDS-TO-PLAYGROUNDS PROGRAM](#), to make more sites accessible to the public to increase the percent of New York residents that have park space accessible to them within walking distance.⁸¹ Although DPR’s Walk to a Park initiative shows that the majority of NYC residents live within a walkable distance to a park, it is unclear whether the agency is mapping walkability based on access to a park entrance or simply access to the park itself. For example, some stretches of

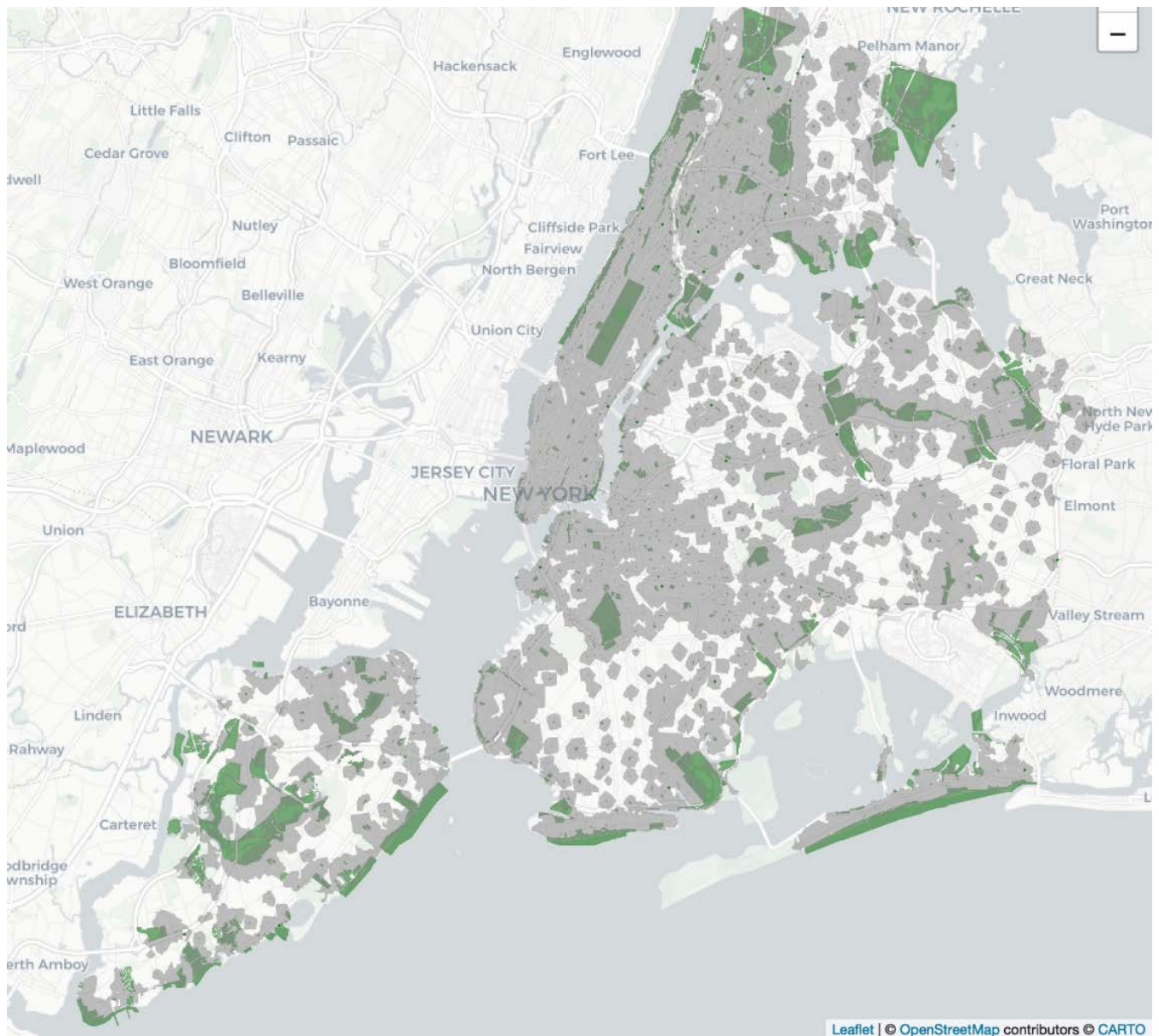
SCHOOLYARDS TO PLAYGROUNDS

Hundreds of schoolyards have been renovated and opened to the public during non-school hours through the Schoolyards to Playgrounds program. The Department of Parks and Recreation is working with the Department of Education and the nonprofit Trust for Public Land to improve many of the schoolyards through capital improvements, including play equipment, painted sports surfaces, trees, and benches.

-Source : <https://www.nycgovparks.org/greening/planyc/schoolyards>

Prospect Park in Brooklyn have no pedestrian access; therefore, depending on which portion of the park you live near, the walk to a pedestrian entrance may well exceed the ½ mile distance DPR has designated for larger parks. Advocates also raised concerns about pedestrian access when parks are bordered or bifurcated by major parkways or highways, such as Forest Park is by the Jackie Robinson Parkway and Flushing Meadows Corona Park is by the Grand Central Parkway.⁸²

For this review, a complementary map to DPR's, "Walk-to-a-Park Service Area" map has been created, offering a more detailed perspective on park accessibility. While the Council's overall estimate—**76 percent of the population within walking distance of a park**—is similar to DPR's 83.9 percent, this analysis distinguishes between different types of green spaces, revealing disparities in access to functional recreational areas.⁸³ This review found:



- **54 percent of residents** can walk to a recreational space like a playground or sports field.
- **41 percent** can walk to a **flagship park or natural area**.
- Only **31 percent** have access to both a community-sized (or larger) park and a recreational space.

These findings highlight that while many New Yorkers live near a park, access to high-quality, usable green space is more limited than the broad statistics suggest. Please see Appendix C for more information.

In conjunction with the Walk to a Park initiative, the agency is exploring other options to improve access to parks and open spaces:

- Expanding the Schoolyard to Playgrounds initiative to renovate and convert more schoolyards to public playgrounds.
- Partnering with other City agencies and private partners to improve the quality and accessibility of underutilized properties and existing open spaces.
- Acquiring and/or transferring and developing properties to create new parkland where possible.
- Improving existing DPR open spaces that are underutilized, by adding trails, amenities, or new access points.

If the agency can implement these initiatives it has the potential to help increase access for residents who find themselves lacking proximity to developed parks and open spaces.

DPR also operates 36 recreation centers throughout all five boroughs.⁸⁴ However, the agency's recreation centers are inequitably distributed with Manhattan, the third most populous borough, housing 36 percent (13) of them. Brooklyn, the city's most populous borough, is home to eight of the 36 recreation centers, most of which are located close to Brooklyn's coast leaving large areas of the borough without easy access to a center. Queens, the second-most populous borough with a population of 2.32 million, has only five recreation centers. That equates to one recreation center for every 463,000 residents; this is nearly four times the ratio of Manhattan, which has one recreation center for nearly every 128,000 residents.^{85,86}

| | BRONX | BROOKLYN | MANHATTAN | QUEENS | STATEN ISLAND |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------|
| Population (Est. as of July 2024) | 1,384,724 | 2,617,631 | 1,660,664 | 2,316,841 | 498,212 |
| Number of Recreation Centers | 6 | 8 | 13 | 5 | 4 |

Some boroughs also have multiple recreation center closures, resulting in many residents being without access to a nearby recreation center. For example, although the Bronx has six centers, at the time of this writing, half of them are currently closed for reconstruction.⁸⁷ DPR's capital construction projects often take years to complete meaning that residents are left without easy access to a center for extended periods of time. After reviewing the agency's Capital Tracker page, which tracks all of the agency's capital construction projects, it appears there are no new recreation center projects in the works.⁸⁸

When advocates and DPR partners were surveyed about whether they felt that the agency's parks and facilities were accessible and equitably distributed throughout the borough, 71 percent of participants felt that they were not. However, many survey participants attributed this to the agency's lack of proper funding and not its capabilities as an agency.⁸⁹

“Compared to other major US cities, New York allocates much less to Parks. San Francisco spends 1.6 percent of its

municipal budget on parks to maintain 4,100 acres of parkland, Los Angeles spends 2.9 percent on 16,000 acres, Chicago 4.3 percent for 9,000 acres and Minneapolis 5.3 percent for 6,800 acres of parkland. New York City is tasked with maintaining 30,000 acres of parkland, nearly double that of Los Angeles, with only .6 percent of its budget. This is a paltry comparison and does not come close to serving the needs of New Yorkers.”⁹⁰

While it is evident that the agency needs more funding to address equity and accessibility issues, it has the ability to reevaluate certain aspects of its parks, recreation centers, and programs as they currently stand. Advocates and DPR partners emphasized creating a racial equity plan that focuses on environmental justice areas, which often have the least amount of investment.

Reducing Barriers for People with Disabilities

Local Law 12 of 2023, codified as Administrative Code Section 23-1004, requires City agencies to develop and implement a five-year accessibility plan in consultation with the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD). This plan must address key accessibility areas, including but not limited to, physical access and programmatic access, to improve accessibility and inclusivity for persons with disabilities.⁹¹

DPR released its accessibility plan in March 2024 laying out its current and future plans for physical and programmatic accessibility, in addition to other key areas. To enhance physical accessibility, the Department ensures that all newly constructed facilities, and any facilities under reconstruction, are ADA compliant. Exterior site projects are designed with sloped walkways that have less than a five percent grade, minimizing the use of ramps, and stairs are added only as secondary pathways or when necessary due to geographic conditions. Furnishings like tables, chairs, drinking fountains, and bottle fillers are also designed to meet accessibility requirements. The agency also stated that building design projects begin with a survey aimed at identifying accessibility issues requiring reconstruction to bring the facility up to compliance.⁹²

Although DPR states in their accessibility plan that they ensure ADA compliance in their newer capital projects; pre-ADA existing facilities have limited accessibility features and lack full compliance. The agency evaluates older facilities to ensure that capital reconstruction projects address the lack of compliance and prioritize accessibility. It also has an Accessibility Coordinator who works with various advocates to identify accessibility needs and coordinates with different divisions to handle each project.^{93,94} However, advocates and agency partners still feel that many older capital projects require major improvements.

In a Council-led roundtable with parks advocates and partners, multiple individuals brought up issues with older capital projects. Numerous roundtable participants stated that the agency lacks necessary funding to keep up with all of the capital projects being done, leaving older facilities and parks in disarray with numerous issues to be addressed. “No additional money is added to DPR’s budget when they build new parks or facilities.”⁹⁵ The agency has experienced a decline in funding over the last few years leaving the agency with only 0.6 percent of the city’s budget, supporting assertions from advocates and partners that the agency is underfunded.^{96,97}

As for programmatic access, the Department offers a variety of adaptive sports and recreational programming geared specifically towards individuals with physical disabilities. DPR also hosts numerous public events, like family festivals and a summer movie series, all held in accessible areas and incorporating adaptive activities for individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, DPR has fully accessible recreation centers, or adaptable hubs, that specifically offer programming to New Yorkers with disabilities. The agency has said that as more recreation centers are built, it intends to increase the adaptive and inclusive programming available to individuals with disabilities.⁹⁸

Since this is a five-year plan that began in 2024, the Council cannot, as of the writing of this report, fully assess the accessibility updates, but it is evident the Department is working towards improving both physical and programmatic accessibility. However, it is clear that additional funding is necessary for the agency to properly maintain its existing capital projects, develop new ones, and implement more accessible programming.

Financial Accessibility

In addition to ensuring physical and geographic accessibility, organizations should ensure that services and programming are financially accessible for their target population. Providing services and programs at little or no cost to users enhances service accessibility, eases financial burden, and reduces economic inequality.^{99,100}

The New York City Administrative Code mandates that certain DPR programming be free, such as summer camps for children ages six to sixteen and swimming lessons for individuals with a recreation center membership, while the cost of other services and programming is left up to the Department's discretion.^{101,102} Many services and events provided by DPR, like fitness classes, movies in the park, theater performances, and Citywide festivals, are free to the public.¹⁰³ Additionally, access to any parks, trails, greenways, and outdoor sports facilities is free to the public as well.

Most of the agency's recreational programming, namely media education classes, swim teams, and youth sports, is free with a recreational membership. The agency recognizes that the cost of recreation center memberships might be a financial barrier for some, so it provides free or reduced memberships to seniors, individuals with disabilities, Veterans, and individuals under the age of 24.¹⁰⁴ However, DPR does not offer free or reduced memberships for individuals based on income. Even though the agency's recreational memberships are low-cost and a financially better option than those in the private market, they may still be out of reach for low-income households. These families or individuals may not have the upfront funds to afford a recreation center membership, so offering a reduced membership option could be beneficial.

In Focus: Increased Access to Diaper Changing Stations in DPR Bathrooms

Enacted on May 12, 2023, Local Law 56 of 2023 required DPR to increase access to diaper changing stations (or similar amenities) in public bathrooms under DPR's jurisdiction. This local law had three phased benchmarks for the Department: having 50 percent of bathrooms equipped with diaper changing stations by December 31, 2025; 75 percent by December 31, 2026; and all bathrooms to have such stations by December 31, 2027, except when the Commissioner determines that the bathroom does not have sufficient space for a changing station or that such station would negatively impact public safety.¹⁰⁵ On March 5, 2025, DPR reported to the Council that 90 percent of bathrooms currently have diaper changing accommodations, and for the remaining bathrooms that could not accommodate these stations due to public safety concerns, over 60 percent "are due to lack of space."¹⁰⁶ The Council appreciates the Department's swift work to reach this milestone and provide greater access to diaper changing stations for parents and caregivers of young children. Additionally, the Council encourages regular maintenance and upkeep of these stations and encourages DPR to evaluate ways to install changing stations in the remaining bathrooms, whether it be part of a major renovation project or through monitoring new product offerings that may address space concerns, to provide greater access to diaper changing stations.

Meeting Demand

Referral Processes

An organization should have processes in place to refer users to alternative services, where necessary, if it cannot provide them with services due to ineligibility or lack of capacity. This ensures the organization meets the highest standard of service accessibility and enhances support for its users.¹⁰⁷

Since many of DPR's services and programs are open to everyone, have no restrictions, and are cost-free, they do not necessitate alternative referral services. However, spots in a select few of the agency's most in-demand programs—such as its summer camps, youth sports teams and clinics, and the Learn to Swim program—are handed out through a lottery system or on a first-come, first-served basis, due to program size restrictions.^{108,109} This most likely means that not everyone who needs or wants a spot will get one.

Although DPR partners with organizations like the CityParks Foundation to offer programs the agency does not provide, the agency does not have a referral system in place for its programs that reach capacity and have a waitlist. Programs like these may be important for low-income families or individuals who do not have the resources to seek them in the private market. Referring them to alternative programs providing the same support could play a vital role in helping them get access to needed programs.

Ensuring Communication and Support

Communication plays a huge role in an organization's ability to deliver consistent, high-quality services and meet the needs of its users. An essential aspect of communication is ensuring the organization provides support to all users through various channels.¹¹⁰ Since DPR serves such a large and diverse target population, the method of support used will vary depending on a parks user's demographics. Providing access to multiple support channels will allow DPR to better serve its users.

In response to a Council inquiry on user support, DPR communicated that they mainly advise parks users to contact 311. The agency stated that 311 is the best method of support if users need to file a complaint or request for service or have a specific question or concern they need addressed.¹¹¹ However, due to the volume of 311 complaints submitted, it is possible for users to encounter longer wait times for their inquiry to be addressed if they contact 311 instead of the agency directly.¹¹²

“The Parks Department is one of the slowest agencies to respond to 311 calls, with the third lowest resolution satisfaction score of all reported agencies who receive 311 calls. DPR also has the third lowest percentage of 311 requests closed within the agreed upon timeframe, and 56% of requests are not corrected at all.”¹¹³

Additionally, DPR shared that parks users can also submit comments and concerns on the agency's website through the 'Contact the Commissioner' link on the 'Contact Us' tab. When complaints, concerns, or questions are submitted, they are reviewed by the Commissioner's office and routed to the appropriate DPR division for response.¹¹⁴ There is also the option to contact the agency by mail, for those users who may not have access to technology, but the response time may be longer than inquiries submitted electronically.¹¹⁵

The agency does not have a direct phone line for users to call nor does it emphasize providing support through its social media channels, which could lead to frustration for users who use those as their main forms of communication. City agencies need to adapt to ever changing modes and preference of communication that are being adopted by the public, especially younger tech saavy generations.

When advocates and agency partners were surveyed about the agency's ability to provide continuous support, almost 60 percent responded with "neither agree nor disagree" or "N/A", 24 percent felt the agency did not provide continuous support, and 18 percent felt they did. While this response paints an unclear picture of the impact of the agency's support services, 82 percent of survey participants stated that DPR is not staffed with enough full-time employees (FTE) to properly support its users, programming, and facilities.¹¹⁶ This response from advocates and DPR partners suggests that increased funding for more FTE might enhance the agency's ability to support users, particularly through phone and social media, opening up more support channels.

Furthermore, organizations should prioritize providing users with information and updates directly through official sources to prevent users from having to initiate contact or seek updates elsewhere.¹¹⁷ Doing so creates more trust and transparency between the organization and its users.

When asked how DPR informs parks users of new or updated information, they responded that they mainly use their membership management system, Xplor Recreation, to communicate any new or updated information to recreation center users through email. They also stated that they routinely use their social media, update their website, and email out newsletters to communicate any service updates.¹¹⁸ However, because the Department leans heavily on its membership management system to send out updates, any parks users without a recreation center membership are likely missing a subset of the Department's updates. This holds especially true for tourists and visitors. DPR should ensure any updates not specific to recreation centers are communicated through the department's other outreach channels as well.

Feedback from advocates and agency partners also suggests that the agency's communication regarding updates needs improvement. Almost half of survey participants responded that they felt the agency was not proactive enough when informing parks users of new or updated information, while only 12 percent felt the agency successfully communicated necessary updates.¹¹⁹ During a roundtable with parks advocates and agency partners, some participants echoed this concern pointing out that the agency is not always on top of the day-of, or weekend-of updates, such as having to close a pool due a lack of lifeguards, leaving parks users unaware of these immediate changes.¹²⁰ The lack of communication about immediate service changes can lead to user frustration or potentially harmful consequences depending on the service being accessed or the individual trying to access it. For example, the Council's Oversight and Investigations Division completed an investigation of DPR restrooms in July 2024 and found that almost 10 percent of the park restrooms inspected were closed when they were supposed to be open.¹²¹ In a city with very few public restrooms, parks restrooms are often one of the more reliable and easy options. Without any prior update that these restrooms were closed, seniors, individuals with disabilities, expecting mothers, or anyone facing a bathroom emergency could face more severe consequences spending time locating a restroom, only for it to be closed. Ensuring that users are aware of immediate service, facility, or program changes is just as important as communicating short-term or long-term updates.

RELATIONSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

The Relationships and Collaboration pillar assesses how inclusive the agency's policy design and improvement processes are. This review also evaluates how well the agency works with outside partners, since agencies often collaborate with outside stakeholders, such as community-based organizations and other governmental agencies, to achieve shared goals. The evaluation is conducted with an understanding that positive working relationships and collaboration are contingent on outside partners' willingness to work with the agencies.

In this section:

- *Stakeholder Engagement*
- *Institutional Engagement*

| Pillar | Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review | Rating |
|---------------------------------|---|--------|
| Relationships and Collaboration | Stakeholder Engagement | B |
| | Institutional Engagement | B |

Stakeholder Engagement

Feedback Processes

Accessible feedback and complaints processes are important to an organization's ability to deliver high-quality services.¹²² Organizations should strive to involve all relevant stakeholders in service delivery and design by soliciting participation through a variety of channels—meetings both in-person and virtual, conferences, and surveys—all with an emphasis on engaging marginalized groups.¹²³ Soliciting participation from parks advocates, non-profit partners, and parks users is a means for DPR to ensure that its services reflect the community it serves.

Since DPR has a relatively small budget and headcount for the amount of users it serves and the number of parks, beaches, trails, and facilities it manages, the Department often collaborates with non-profit partners for support.¹²⁴ When DPR was asked how they ensure accessible feedback and complaints processes for non-profit partners, their response was minimal stating that disagreements are handled differently, depending on the terms and conditions of the related agreement; they noted, “[s]uch agreements are negotiated at arms-length and are freely entered into and, therefore, should provide fair and accessible outcomes for all parties involved.”¹²⁵

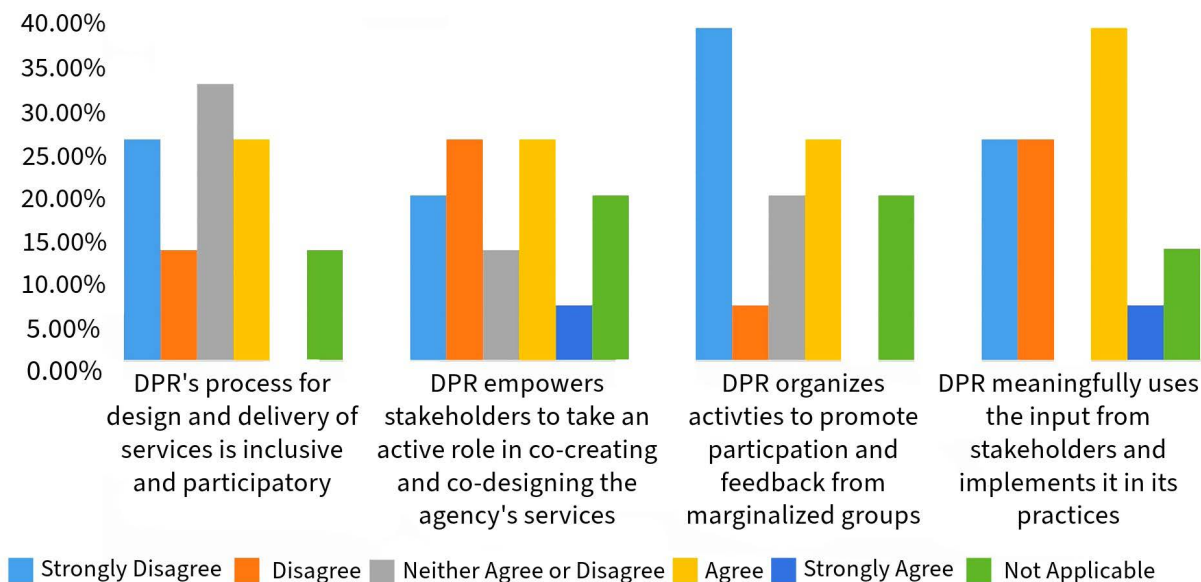
When surveyed about the agency's feedback and complaints processes, most advocates and DPR partners surveyed did not express a clear perspective on this subject.¹²⁶ However, in a roundtable with the Council, advocates and DPR partners expressed frustration with the process of obtaining any kind of agreement in the first place. Numerous roundtable participants stated that there is often a lack of standardization in the contracts DPR has with different organizations, noting a perceived reluctance from DPR to standardize these agreements. Some parks advocacy groups have also found obtaining an operating agreement to be a difficult process; 53 percent of survey participants responded that the process for securing an agreement with DPR was complicated and inefficient.¹²⁷ Multiple partner organizations have been unsuccessful in obtaining any sort of formalized agreement with DPR and have been assisting in park management without a formal agreement.^{128,129} The lack of agreement standardization and the absence of agreements with some advocacy groups suggests that the feedback and complaints processes are inequitable at best, and at worst, nonexistent.

Nevertheless, DPR does provide more structured feedback and complaints processes for the public. When asked what avenues they provide the public with to submit complaints or requests, DPR responded that the two main options are to submit service requests through 311 or contact the agency directly.¹³⁰ To gather feedback, DPR uses a variety of channels to engage with community members and gain insights into services and programs. The agency stated that they participate in the Council's participatory budgeting process (which is common across agencies); attend community board meetings; distribute surveys; hold Community Visioning sessions; and encourage program attendees to share feedback with instructors and recreation center staff, which is subsequently shared with the agency.^{131,132} The Department also works to

engage individuals with disabilities by attending monthly meetings with Disabilities Service Facilitators; who are agency representatives appointed as liaisons for New Yorkers with disabilities to help connect them to City government.^{133,134}

When advocates and non-profit partners were surveyed about DPR under the umbrella of stakeholder and community engagement, their responses were mixed.

Stakeholder and Community Engagement



These mixed responses suggest that even though DPR has feedback and complaints processes in place, there could be room for improvement: whether that be more diverse feedback channels, gathering feedback on a more frequent basis, or ensuring they are properly communicating all opportunities for feedback to advocates, parks partners, and the public. For example, the Community Visioning meetings are not immediately accessible on the agency's website and may be difficult for someone to find were they not aware of the meetings beforehand.¹³⁵ One advocate stated that they have never been notified about Community Visioning sessions and only found out about them through social media leaving them little time to inform community members.¹³⁶

Additionally, since the agency only mentioned engaging individuals with disabilities when specifically asked how they promote participation and feedback from marginalized groups, advocates and agency partners may not be aware of agency efforts in this area or feel that the agency is not engaging other marginalized communities in an effective way.

Advocates and other related organizations, in responding to Council surveys and roundtables, highlighted the need for the Department to continue to identify ways to improve its collaboration with parks users, advocates, and agency partners to refine and strengthen their feedback methods, including but not limited to how often DPR attends community board meetings and distributes surveys, and how DPR constructs and disseminates surveys.

Communication with Stakeholders

In addition to an organization's feedback and complaints process, meaningful communication with stakeholders and users is important in delivering relevant and appropriate services to the parks community.¹³⁷

Information provided by DPR indicated that the Department understands and sees itself as committed to maintaining open and transparent communication with parks users and relevant advocates, stakeholders, and other partners. The Department did not identify issues with its engagement process. Responses from parks advocates and stakeholders were more mixed reflecting myriad issues facing the agency. For example, 76 percent of advocates and agency partners responded that they feel their ability to successfully work with DPR has been impacted by budget cuts and staffing shortages. More generally, they also noted other struggles with departmental communication. Some of those responses highlighting the wide range of experiences include:

- *“Their communication is on a ‘needs to-know basis’ platform, thus leaving the organization with a lot of questions when things come up and not enough answers.”*
- *“There is no relationship with the Parks Department from our end. In fact, we’ve had to send numerous follow-up emails to get answers to things.”*
- *Community input sessions, which are invaluable and can provide thoughtful and insightful feedback to the agency, are only publicized on social media. At no time has our organization been reached out to and directly invited.*
- *“NYC Parks is proactive about public communications.”*

Advocates and agency partners were also asked whether DPR provided a clear point of contact for each organization's needs. Fifty-three percent of respondents agreed, while 24 percent felt the agency did not.¹³⁸ Despite some mixed responses, a common theme that emerged was an acknowledgment of DPR's existing systems and a sincere understanding of the importance of community engagement; advocates perceive ongoing issues as stemming more from insufficient staff resources rather than inefficiencies caused by the Department itself. For example, one agency partner said, “DPR cares deeply about community engagement; this doesn't always translate but it is definitely a top priority.” *A parks advocate also noted that the Department “has systems in place to conduct meaningful community engagement and outreach but does not have sufficient staff resources to support this work.”*¹³⁹

Overall, this feedback suggests that DPR's communications with advocacy groups and non-profit partners may change depending on the organization and their relationship with DPR, potentially due to factors like understaffing or agency priorities. To address this discrepancy, and consistent with the Council's findings regarding DPR's digital government efforts, DPR should explore ways to embed a continuous improvement approach to its community outreach efforts and look to develop a public engagement plan, which recognizes the needs of different members of the community and stakeholders, and which provides measures for continuously tailoring its outreach approaches to better align with the Department's wider strategic priorities.

Institutional Engagement

Organizations should have strategic agreements in place with other governmental institutions to achieve outcomes that cannot be executed independently.¹⁴⁰ These partnerships and strategic agreements should be structured to allow all organizations involved to work effectively to ensure high-quality service provision.¹⁴¹

In this review, DPR has asserted that they often work with fellow City agencies on shared projects, such as Citywide task forces or Citywide initiatives.¹⁴² For example, ‘Parks Without Borders,’ which focused on improving neighborhood access and connectivity, was done in partnership with the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice (MOCEJ).¹⁴³ Most recently it was announced that DPR would be working with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to develop new affordable housing units and a state-of-the-art recreation center in Lower Manhattan.¹⁴⁴ The agency also enters into Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with other agencies to provide additional parklike amenities for properties they do not typically have jurisdiction over. DPR has entered into 50+ MOUs over the last 20 years spanning from tree planting on Department of Correction sites to expanding and supporting the Department of Education’s ‘Learn to Swim’ program.¹⁴⁵

In addition to managing or contributing to non-DPR specific projects, DPR partners with City agencies like the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), OTI, the Department for the Aging (DFTA), and others to operate many of its own recreational programs, such as summer camps, media lessons, swim lessons, and youth sports teams.¹⁴⁶

Advocates and agency partners have highlighted concerns about the effectiveness of agency partnerships and the extent of coordination amongst the agencies. In a roundtable with the Council, advocates and agency partners voiced significant frustration with interagency coordination, largely faulting the Administration and other agencies. Many roundtable participants expressed their observation that the Administration does not view DPR as an essential department, leading other agencies to deprioritize supporting it, despite DPR often being asked to support other agency efforts. For example, the City’s climate and resiliency plans do not have a dedicated role for DPR, nor does the agency receive any funding to help with these plans, but they are still expected to use their own resources to support these projects.^{147,148}

Additionally, advocates noted a lack of top-down coordination from the Office of the Mayor that complicates the relationships between City agencies and allows things to “fall through the cracks.”^{149,150} Achieving effective interagency coordination and cooperation among governmental agencies is crucial for ensuring that agencies understand their respective roles and are using their available resources wisely.

Some advocates also feel that the lack of coordination has created a sense of competition amongst the agencies making them less willing to support each other. One advocate noted that “[i]t is very hard to even get temporary use of other agency’s sites—agencies do not want to share their space, so they will not cooperate”.^{151,152}

Although DPR has partnerships with other City agencies in place, it appears that a lack of top-down management from City Hall or direction is hindering interagency coordination. When coordination comes from a directing agency, other agencies are better equipped and incentivized to work with each other, especially given that many agencies remain understaffed and do not have the capacity to fulfill their own department needs.¹⁵³ As this report identifies in its *Leadership, Strategy, and Direction* pillar, one potential example is the lack of response the Council received despite repeated requests to Mayor’s Office of City Legislative Affairs for the Administration to provide its Charter-mandated strategic policy statement,

which requires identification of the City's priorities. While outside of the scope of this review on DPR specifically, this issue highlights the important and ongoing role that the Office of the Mayor needs to play in coordinating agency efforts to make sure that DPR can better connect its strategic priorities with the City intended strategic vision.

In Focus: DPR and Ancillary Offices

As part of the inaugural round of the Council's Report Card Initiative, the assessment team met with ancillary offices throughout the Administration that impact the work of the assessed Departments, including DPR.

Created in January 2023, the Mayor's Office of Municipal Services Assessment (MSA) has a DPR employee detailed to conduct independent assessments of park locations. MSA has developed two matrices to assess recreation centers and park spaces. Recreation center assessments are conducted on approximately 25-30 randomly selected facilities, while park space assessments focus on community parks rather than the larger parks in the DPR system. Assessments consider items such external conditions of facilities, locker room and bathroom cleanliness, signage, cameras, and first aid items such as external defibrillator devices. MSA reported generally very satisfactory conditions, with DPR being very responsive in addressing reported issues, but the outcomes of these assessments are not publicly available. MSA noted that they have a Sanitation Department (DSNY) employee detailed to their office as well, which can assist DPR with interagency cooperation, but this cannot be independently verified as the Office's work is not publicized. In addition to DPR and DSNY, MSA conducts assessments for the Department of Buildings, Department of Consumer and Worker Protection, Department of Correction, Department of Education, Fire Department, and Police Department.

Source: Information provided by the Mayor's Office of Municipal Services Assessment on Aug. 14, 2024. On file with the Compliance Division.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Workforce Development pillar focuses on the agency's staff capacity, training, and development. This review measures how well the agency maintains its headcount, trains and develops its staff, and ensures that staff are reflective of the communities being served. This pillar is evaluated with an understanding that the agency maintains and develops staff using the resources available to the agency.

In this section:

- *Staff Capacity*
- *Staff Development*

| Pillar | Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review | Rating |
|-----------------------|---|--------|
| Workforce Development | Staff Capacity | C |
| | Staff Development | A |

Staff Capacity

Maintaining appropriate staffing capacities is important for agencies to ensure that they meet the needs of the community. In government, budgets are limited and expectations high. Staff capacity is highly contingent on proper budgetary and resource allocation, and chronic underfunding may severely hinder an agency's ability to carry out its core functions.

"Every person I have interacted with at DPR is incredibly professional and devoted to their work. They are completely understaffed and under-resourced. They are buried in red tape which impacts the feasibility, cost and timeline of projects."¹⁵⁴

DPR identified its baseline staffing plan, articulated through the annual adopted budget, to maintain equitable staffing distribution in communities throughout the city, and it is informed by input from agency borough and division leadership.¹⁵⁵ DPR also noted through its "Table of Organization" and in responses to the Council that operationally, multiple divisions have a role in managing staffing capacities across the organization. DPR employs staff across: Operations, Environment and Planning, Capital Projects, Business Development and Special Events, Urban Park Service and Public Programs, Community Outreach and Partnership Development, Administration, and borough departments for each of the five boroughs.¹⁵⁶ Although, as discussed in the Leadership, Strategy, and Direction pillar, these divisions are not reflected on DPR's "Divisions" webpage.¹⁵⁷ The Commissioner is supported by a First Deputy Commissioner and five Deputy Commissioners who oversee various departments within the Department.¹⁵⁸

DPR has a headcount of more than 4,000 employees, with a FY25 Budget of \$445.5 million for personal services to support its full-time positions.¹⁵⁹ DPR's 'other than personal services' budget, which includes contractual services, is another \$138.2 million. Despite its size, DPR's budget accounts for only less than one percent of the City's budget, with the Department relying on a large number of conservancies and other organizations through official agreements to provide maintenance, operations, programs, and community services at certain parks, in addition to its reliance on a large number of seasonal workers and annual volunteers who help to care for local parks.

DPR's budgeted headcount has fluctuated over the past nine fiscal years. While the Department's overall budgeted headcount has increased by six percent since FY17, there have been declines in recent years with the budgeted headcount decreasing from 4,830 in FY23 to 4,450 in FY25.¹⁶⁰ The Council has previously called for a funding restoration to bring back DPR positions that were cut due to budget cuts and a Citywide hiring freeze.¹⁶¹

In Focus: Lost Funding, Lost Workforce¹⁶²

During last year's budget negotiations, the Administration deprioritized parks, cutting its funding and diminishing its workforce.

- *Last year's Program to Eliminate the GAP(PEG) reduced Parks spending by 5%, and in conjunction with FY25 budget reductions, this resulted in about 800 potential job vacancies that can no longer be filled.*

"DPR is severely understaffed due to City Hall defunding the agency during the annual budget process."¹⁶³



In its actual headcount, DPR has not consistently reached its budgeted staffing levels. As of January 2025, DPR had a vacancy rate of 7.8 percent agency-wide—slightly above the citywide average of 5.5 percent.¹⁶⁴ Despite this trend line for the broader DPR workforce, certain civil service titles have increased in recent years. According to a report by the New York City Independent Budget Office, the City Park Worker headcount is “[u]p 50% (+328), despite a large drop from July 2020 through June 2022.”¹⁶⁵ Other positions, like Community Coordinators, Associate Park Service Workers, Park Supervisors, and Urban Park Rangers have also seen similar trend lines.¹⁶⁶

The Department reports that its Capital Projects Division has seen the highest number of vacancies.¹⁶⁷ This is somewhat reflected in advocate survey feedback, with five of seventeen responses indicating that they believe Capital Projects has experienced the most significant staffing shortages. However, most responses (nine) reported the most significant staffing shortages are in Maintenance & Operations,¹⁶⁸ despite most of the Department workforce being allocated to Maintenance & Operations (in the January 2025 Financial Plan for FY25, 80 percent). The rest of the Department's budgeted headcount was divided between Recreation, Urban Park Service, Forestry and Horticulture, Capital Projects, and Administration.¹⁶⁹ Most advocate survey respondents felt budget cuts and staffing shortages had impacted their ability to work with DPR (24 percent disagreed and 53 percent strongly disagreed with the statement: "[b]udget cuts and staffing shortages have not impacted your ability to successfully work with the DPR").¹⁷⁰

However, staffing shortages can impact not only partner organizations and advocates work with DPR, but also New Yorkers visiting parks. When DPR does not have the staff to properly maintain and care for parks, these spaces can "have cracked pavement, are often filled with trash and graffiti, lack adequate trees, have no planted areas, offer no free programming."¹⁷¹ While this feedback described parks in lower-income communities, it signals potential impacts on parks users when there are staffing shortages.

"According to the PMMR, the percentage of parks rated acceptable for overall condition was 85% and acceptable for cleanliness was 92% in the first four months of FY25, decreases compared to the same period in FY24 when overall condition was 88% and cleanliness was 92 percent. This was attributed to the loss of "second shift" staff at 100 locations during the summer of 2024 from city budget reductions, which were not practically reversed until fall 2024, as the result of the Council's budget restoration."¹⁷²

In Focus: Lifeguard Staffing Shortages

Each year, DPR works to assign approximately 1,400 lifeguards to beaches and pools throughout the City.¹⁷³ To become a lifeguard: a person must sign up and pass the Lifeguard Qualifying Test; a vision and swim exam; complete the requisite lifeguard training; and then be offered a full-time position.¹⁷⁴ Lifeguard Qualifying Tests take place over winter, with the lifeguard training, or Municipal Lifeguard Training Program, consisting of a 16-session program that includes a written test, a final swimming test, 40 hours of training, and a CPR course, among other requirements.

In recent years, lifeguard shortages have resulted in suspended swim programs and concerns over swim safety.^{175,176,177} Seven people died due to drowning at New York City beaches in 2024, the highest number of drowning deaths since 2019.¹⁷⁸ Lifeguard shortages can also force closures at beach sections and pools based on staff availability. DPR outlined how it makes an effort to distribute available lifeguards equitably across the city, and prioritizes opening as many beach sections and pools as possible considering typical attendance numbers and community needs. When beach sections are closed, they are marked with signs and/or red flags, and closed sections of pools are roped off to, "limit capacity and ensure the public is safe."¹⁷⁹

To address staffing shortages, the Department has taken steps to incentivize potential applicants and make it easier to become certified. First, the City and District Council 37 (representing the lifeguard union), have negotiated and reached agreements in 2022, 2023, and 2024 to raise salaries and improve benefits for lifeguards. In 2022, the salary was raised to \$19.46 per hour, which later increased to \$21.26 in 2023 and \$22.00 in 2024.¹⁸⁰ Retention bonuses and increased training offerings for mini-pools were

also included in the agreements. The Department also reformed strict vision and testing standards in 2024 to align with state and industry standards.¹⁸¹

In reviewing the impact of these efforts, it is clear there are remaining challenges to filling all budgeted lifeguard positions. In July 2023, the Commissioner stated that the City employed over 800 lifeguards for the 2023 summer season. Although, all of the City's public pools and beaches remained open last season, DPR restricted access to portions of certain beaches and pools due to a lack of lifeguards.



Dry Dock Playground, Manhattan

In Focus: Lifeguard Staffing Shortages continued

Additionally, DPR has been required to produce an annual report on staffing and training at beaches and pools, among other measures, since 2023. In its first report released in 2024, the Department stated that for the 2024 summer season, there were 864 lifeguards attending beach and outdoor pools and 68 lifeguards attending indoor pools (who work year-round at recreation centers). While legislation does not require the Department to provide further contextual information, these numbers indicate that the Department continues to fall well short of its estimated number of lifeguards to operate DPR's facilities optimally.

While acknowledging DPR's ongoing budgetary and resourcing constraints, the Department should continue to explore avenues to increase the number of lifeguards. The Council welcomes DPR's efforts to increase the number of qualifying sessions for its Lifeguard Qualifying Tests, increase remuneration, and changes to rules regarding qualification times. The Department should continue to review its lifeguard qualification requirements, explore new ways to ease hiring rules for when new lifeguards can be certified and work to offer more sessions for its Lifeguard Qualifying Test across the city. Aside from its press releases, the Department should also consider including further information on DPR's Lifeguard landing page to indicate more clearly the locations that have the most spaces available for its qualifying sessions.

Due to the seasonal nature of DPR's work, full-time and part-time staffing needs can shift making it difficult for the Department to quantify the 'optimal' number of employees needed.¹⁸² Based on a review of DPR's civil service title trends, it is clear that City Seasonal Aide has remained one of the most-staffed positions.¹⁸³ As noted, DPR's baseline staffing plan helps maintain "equitable staffing distribution" across the boroughs and divisions, which also helps inform its budget.¹⁸⁴ It also has determined core services, which the Department summarized as:

- Maintaining the City's parks, playgrounds, infrastructure, and safety equipment, while ensuring acceptable ratings for the cleanliness and overall condition of parks.
- Sustaining parks through workforce transformation programs. Parks maintenance is also provided in partnership with the City's Human Resources Administration for the Parks Opportunity Program. This program provides a workforce to assist in the maintenance and operation of park facilities and helps to train and employ public assistance recipients.
- Operating and employing lifeguards at pools and beaches during the summer months.
- Maintaining street trees and natural areas (forests and wetlands), including park flora and fauna. Activities include tree pruning, dead tree removal, ecological restoration, tree planting and contractor oversight.
- Designing and supervising park construction.¹⁸⁵

In response to how it addresses maintaining adequate staffing levels, the Department noted that it, "consistently strives to identify creative ways to provide improved service delivery." Some past creative methods include the Climber & Pruner Training Program, which addressed recruitment challenges and one-shot funding. The Department cited one-shot funding as crucial for service delivery, with the funding providing "additional focused resources to bolster the efforts of our full-time staff."¹⁸⁶ In FY25, one-shot

funding resulted in 50 Rangers and six Green Thumb staff lines in the Adopted Budget.¹⁸⁷ However, the reliance on one-shot financing can present challenges, as the percentage of these positions funded for more than one year varies widely depending on annual budget negotiations.¹⁸⁸ While this funding enables DPR to expand its workforce temporarily, it also creates uncertainty for long-term staffing stability and planning. One advocate shared that “[m]any challenges could be resolved by properly staffing the agency and converting more positions from oneshots to baselines.”¹⁸⁹ This advocate also felt that by needing to advocate for this funding each year, the Department could negatively impact their workforce, as it can create “uncertainty” and “fatigue” with staff.¹⁹⁰

“Extremely dedicated, smart, [sic] caring people. They are all drowning in work.”¹⁹¹

Despite DPR’s efforts, there is a discrepancy between the Department’s staffing levels and the community’s needs. As referenced in the *Service Delivery for New Yorkers* pillar, many advocates felt that DPR is not sufficiently staffed to function efficiently. Sixty-five percent of surveyed advocates strongly disagreed with the statement: “DPR is staffed with the necessary number of FTE (full-time employees) to adequately support all facilities, programming, and other services.”¹⁹² Further, no advocate survey respondents agreed that “staffing level[s] for each department function is proportionate to the community’s demonstrated level of need” (just over half of respondents strongly disagreed).¹⁹³ Aside from general concerns with DPR’s lack of staffing due to perceived inadequate funding, advocate feedback also expressed concerns with the Department’s increasing reliance on temporary or seasonal staff compromising the Department’s ability to maintain all parks at an optimal level of service, with one advocate noting its effect resulting in an unstable workforce, high turnover, and lack of institutional knowledge. Further information on DPR maintenance and operations can be found in Appendix D.

In Focus: Department staff perspectives crucial for managing operations effectively

Organizations can achieve transparency and accessibility by, where possible, publicly making the results of surveys, consultations, reports, and evaluations available. For this report, the Council did not receive information from DPR despite asking the Department whether it completes internal DPR staff engagement surveys, with results reported back to staff. Agency engagement surveys are an important resource in enabling agencies to develop specific action plans to respond to survey findings. Aside from feedback from DPR’s management, as well as advocates, stakeholders, and other related organizations; this review also did not receive direct feedback from DPR staff regarding their perspectives on DPR’s current staffing capacities. In terms of its future focus, DPR would benefit from conducting regular engagement surveys with its staff. DPR should make results from its surveys available to their staff, and to the general public, where possible.

One challenge in assessing the adequacy of the Department’s staffing levels, is the agency’s lack of transparency in making more accessible its staffing numbers and particularly its staffing needs. For example, the MMR only lists different staffing categories at an agency level, without further disaggregation across sub-divisions within the Department. Advocate feedback also confirmed that further transparency would assist partnering organizations in better understanding DPR’s staffing needs. One advocate proposed that DPR should have a multi-year budget or at least a multi-year seasonal plan baselined so that business can

proceed. In addition to other existing accountability mechanisms, the Department might also benefit from articulating, through a regular strategic plan, its anticipated workforce needs over a multi-year period to provide additional context to the information provided in the MMR and for each year's budget.

Staff Development

Recruitment

Organizations should establish: “transparent and accountable recruitment and selection processes that ensure people working in the organization possess the knowledge, skills, and experience required to fulfill their roles.”¹⁹⁴ The Council heard from DPR that it uses all applicable local, state, and federal laws related to hiring practices to guide its hiring practices. The Department also noted that it uses different approaches when hiring for full-time versus non-competitive and seasonal positions to ensure staff have proper qualifications. DPR relies on civil service lists for full-time positions, while non-competitive and seasonal positions are posted on the DPR website noting requirements and preferences.¹⁹⁵ Those with the highest score are offered the position based on the applicants who are interviewed.¹⁹⁶ As DPR follows the standard recruitment policies of the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS), this targeted review does not examine these practices.

OECD recommends that public service organizations hire staff who reflect the diversity of communities served creating a more efficient and empathetic public sector.¹⁹⁷ In its agency survey, DPR highlighted its commitment to this and outlined two established procedures for implementation. First, DPR examines its workforce data and “develops proactive measures to address titles lacking in diversity.” Additionally, the agency makes an effort to extend its outreach for who is hired by expanding its pool of applicants through job fairs and recruitment sources, such as LinkedIn.¹⁹⁸ These efforts are reflected in the opinions of park advocates. Most advocate survey participants (53 percent) agreed with the statement, “DPR hires and maintains a staff that reflects the diversity of the communities it serves.”¹⁹⁹

As the Department maintains parks that serve the entire city, the DPR workforce should represent the broader NYC population. A comparative analysis of workforce data against NYC's 2020 census data can also reveal areas where representation aligns with or deviates from the city's demographics. DPR is one of the participating agencies in the EquityNYC Report, which tracks equity-related outcomes and metrics for City agencies. DPR's FY23 workforce diversity²⁰⁰ data showed that the Department's workforce includes a higher proportion of Black/African American employees (32 percent) compared to their share of the NYC population (22.7 percent), while the representation of Asian (11.5 percent) and Hispanic (19.9 percent) employees falls below their respective citywide percentages (14.6 percent and 28.4 percent, respectively). White (non-Hispanic) employees represent 25.9 percent of DPR's workforce, slightly below their 31.3 percent share of NYC's population.^{201,202} DPR also had a higher proportion of male employees than NYC's general population, as well as the City workforce. While the citywide workforce was 49.7 percent female, the DPR workforce was only 33.5 percent female. The citywide percentage is closer to 2020 census data where 52.3 percent of NYC residents identified as female.^{203,204}

Training and Development

Training and professional development can enhance workforce productivity and skillsets within an organization. The Human Services Quality Framework recommends organizations provide “people working in the [organization] with induction, training and development opportunities relevant to their roles.”²⁰⁵ The Department identified its “Parks Academy” as DPR’s primary tool for training, development, and continuing education opportunities for its staff. The Parks Academy operates within the Office of the Chief of Management under the Chief Administrative Officer and offers a range of training courses to over 10,000 employees each year. While DPR reports topics evolve each year, some example course topics include: “park inspections, proper chainsaw use, leadership development, blueprint reading, defensive driving, horticultural maintenance, filter plant operations, and commercial driver’s license training.”²⁰⁶ Courses are offered for different lengths of time and are delivered through various methods enabling staff who work regular, night, or weekend shifts to participate. Courses could be, “computer-based, field-based, virtual, classroom, in-house specialized training, [or] year-long professional development.”²⁰⁷

Workforce Development Programs

In addition to its internal development opportunities, DPR’s Workforce Development unit enables the Department to create employment programs for NYC residents outside of their own workforce. Several programs are highlighted on DPR’s website: Parks Opportunity Program, Green Applied Projects for Parks, YouthWRAP, Youth Sustainability Corps, and Summer Youth Employment Program.²⁰⁸

Parks Opportunity Program

The Parks Opportunity Program (POP) is a six-month program in which DPR hires unemployed New Yorkers. Workers receive “on-the-job training, career coaching and specialized training opportunities” while simultaneously cleaning parks and facilities.²⁰⁹ At the beginning of the program, POP employees are trained for five days before being assigned to their worksite.²¹⁰

Green Applied Projects for Parks

Young adults (aged 18 to 24 year-olds) can participate in Green Applied Projects for Parks, a full-time, 11-week project. Time is split between work assignments (four days a week) and job readiness workshops and classes (one day a week). Work assignments involve implementing a team project with other young adults in a local park.²¹¹

YouthWRAP

Through YouthWRAP (Weekend Restorative Assistance Program) teenagers and young adults (14-25 years old) on probation can participate in restorative justice programming over the weekend. In addition to networking programming, participants may “clean park grounds, beautify and rebuild community gardens, or prepare care packages for those most in need.”²¹²

Some advocates questioned DPR's workforce development training processes noting a general lack of support, insufficient training, and resulting flow on effects for staff retention. While one advocate reported, "[p]eople working for Parks are usually well trained and qualified," another stated, "cross-training within departments and employees" is needed.²¹³

These concerns suggest that more work needs to be done by DPR in managing its staff training and development. Overall, this review received only minimal information from DPR on its Parks Academy system, with limited information being publicly available on DPR's website. As a benefit to being a DPR employee, the Department does refer to its professional development opportunities, outlining "training programs, leadership development opportunities, and career coaching services" on the Job Opportunities webpage.²¹⁴ However, there are no further details beyond that publicly available.

Additionally, on the webpage, the course catalog or a sampling of available courses, is unavailable making assessing the specific training employees receive difficult. DPR should consider improving access to its training materials, where appropriate, to help new parks hires, and the public, better understand the training and development opportunities available for the Department's workforce.

In Focus: Workplace Injuries

DPR's MMR includes workplace injuries reported by staff. From FY20 through to FY24, there was a steady increase from 444 to 655 reported. The largest increase was between FY23 and FY24, when there was an increase from 457 to 655—an increase of 198 over the previous fiscal year alone.²¹⁵ Reviewing the PMMR for FY25 signals this trend may continue to rise in the current fiscal year: in the first four months, there have been 314 workplace injuries reported (up from 227 in FY23).²¹⁶ While advocates and stakeholders surveyed for this review did not directly raise the issue of workplace injuries, they did raise concerns with what they experienced as DPR's understaffing and overreliance on seasonal workers and its effect that some staff lack institutional knowledge of full-time employees. While the MMR signals a potential issue here, a current lack of contextual information on these injuries, or why there has been a recent uptick, inhibits further scrutiny. The Department should consider providing additional information in the MMR on how and where these injuries are occurring, and any corrective actions being taken to improve worker safety.

FINANCIAL AND RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The Financial and Resources Management pillar presents the resources and budget allocated to the agency and outlines the current citywide procurement process.

In this section:

- *Financial Management*
- *Review of the Procurement Process*

| Pillar | Indicators | Description |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Financial and Resources Management | Financial Management | Presentation of agency's resources and budget allocations |
| | Review of the Procurement Process | <p>There are a number of similar issues raised by agency RFPs, contracting, and late payments (for non-profit providers), but this report card will not evaluate this type of agency work. Instead, the report card will outline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal Landscape Key Procurement Achievements Issues and Concerns |

This Pillar is not graded because this report card is not a financial review document. Moreover, the Council engages the Administration in a robust annual budget process, which represents a more appropriate forum for addressing the fiscal management of the agency, and the financial resource constraints and issues facing the agency.

Financial Management

For Fiscal Year 2026, DPR's Adopted budget was \$687.6 million—representing 0.6 percent of the City's FY26 Adopted Budget of \$115.9 billion. DPR's FY26 Adopted budget also included a budgeted headcount of 5,034 full-time positions. For FY25, DPR's Adopted budget is \$618.1 million—representing roughly 0.5 percent of the City's total budget and a \$20.1 million decrease from the agency's Fiscal Year 2024 Adopted Budget. DPR's Fiscal Year 2026 Adopted budget includes 5,034 full-time positions, 584 more positions than the Fiscal Year 2024 Adopted Budget. Roughly 61.4 percent of DPR's headcount, 3,091 positions, will be allocated to maintenance and operations throughout the five boroughs making up the largest portion of the agency's staff.²¹⁷ The rest of the agency's budgeted headcount will be divided between Recreation, Urban Park Service, Forestry and Horticulture, Capital, and Administration.²¹⁸

"The Adams' Administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Preliminary Plan proposed \$50.5 million less funding for DPR than what was ultimately included in the FY25 adopted budget. While several other agencies impacted by the mayor's budget reductions recovered significant portions of their funding compared to the preliminary budget, DPR restorations in the adopted Fiscal Year 2025 budget still lagged. The City Council successfully negotiated back \$23.7 million in funding that was included in the FY25 adopted budget, but support for Parks staff and programs suffered."²¹⁹

DPR Funding and Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget

"During last year's budget negotiations, the Administration deprioritized parks, cutting its funding and diminishing its workforce. Last year's PEG reduced Parks spending by 5%, and in conjunction with FY25 budget reductions, this resulted in about 800 potential job vacancies that can no longer be filled. The City Council was able to restore \$23.7 million of proposed cuts to Parks funding in the FY25 budget. \$15 million to enhance and restore funding for Second Shift maintenance and cleaning positions at hot spots in city parks. \$8.7 million to support Urban Park Rangers, Tree Stump Removal, and Green Thumb Restoration."²²⁰

Proposed FY26 Parks Budget

“The Adams Administration’s preliminary budget for FY26 proposes restorations of some of the previously cut funding. In his State of the City address on January 9, Mayor Adams announced his FY26 budget will include \$12.4 million in new funding to expand second shift cleanings to an additional 100 hot spots beyond what was baselined in the FY26 budget, bringing the total amount of hot spots being serviced to 200 across the city. However, compared to FY24, there is still about \$7.4 million in funding for parks items that was not included in the FY26 preliminary budget. The Administration did not propose funding for many Parks-related items that were in the FY25 budget, including Urban Park Rangers, the Green Thumb Program, and more.”²²¹

FY26 Parks Adopted Budget

On June 30, 2025, the City Council voted unanimously to approve a \$115.9 billion budget for Fiscal Year 2026. The FY26 budget includes many of the priorities shared by the Council and New Yorkers for investments in the city and neighborhoods across the five boroughs. Council Parks priorities added to the FY26 budget through negotiations include:

- Urban Park Rangers, Tree Stump Removal, Forestry Management, and Green Thumb Program Restoration – \$11.7 million to restore, enhance, and baseline funding for Urban Park Rangers, additional tree stump removal, forestry management and the GreenThumb program.
- Parks Workers – \$6.1 million for the Parks Department starting in Fiscal 2026 to hire over 70 additional parks maintenance workers and lifting of the 2:1 hiring freeze for certain positions.

Review of the Procurement Process

According to the Mayor’s Office of Contract Services (MOCS), in FY23, the Department had 2,391 contracts out of 147,140 citywide contracts.²²² The FY24 Adopted budget included 284 contracts with a combined amount of \$77.4 million and the FY25 Adopted Budget included 284 contracts with a combined amount of \$68.9 million.²²³

With the understanding that public procurement, including the capital process, does not operate in a vacuum and touches a multitude of City agencies, and because there have been recent City-led efforts to address the chronic problems with procurement, this report will not grade DPR on procurement. This report will outline the issues and concerns raised by advocates and steps that have been taken by the City to attempt to address and fix long-standing issues.

Legal Landscape

“Public procurement is the process local, state, and federal government agencies use to acquire necessary goods and services through purchases from for-profit and not-for-profit businesses.”²²⁴ Procurement in New York City is governed by New York State Law, the New York City Charter, the Administrative Code of the City of New York, and the Rules of the New York City, including the Procurement Policy Board Rules.

The governmental entities charged with oversight over the City’s procurement of goods, services, and construction are MOCS and the Procurement Policy Board (PPB). The PPB exercises power pursuant to Chapter 13 of the New York City Charter and MOCS is not a codified entity in local law, however, the

Administrative Code of the City of New York does define the City Chief Procurement Officer, defined as the individual to whom the mayor has delegated authority to coordinate and oversee the procurement activity of mayoral agency staff, including the agency chief contracting officers and any offices that have oversight responsibility for procurement.²²⁵

MOCS sets citywide procurement policies, provides guidance to City agencies on procurement matters (including training and education), and manages the City’s digital procurement platform—the Procurement and Sourcing Solutions Portal (PASSPort). PPB is authorized to promote and put into effect rules governing the procurement of goods, services, and construction.²²⁶

With one of the largest contracting budgets in the world,²²⁷ New York City purchases more than \$30 billion in goods and services each year.²²⁸ In FY23, the City entered into 147,140 contracts, accounting for almost \$41.1 billion dollars of goods and services “from outside contractors, ranging from nonprofits providing community services, to construction firms, to goods suppliers, that ensured that City agencies run smoothly and deliver on their missions.”²²⁹ In FY24, the City entered into 155,000 contracts accounting for \$34.4 billion dollars of good and services.²³⁰

Capital Process Overview

DPR is clear on its website how its capital process works.²³¹ It is presented in such a way that the public would be able to learn and understand how parks are built throughout the city. The process is broken down into three stages: design, procurement, and construction. Within each of those stages, the process is broken down further.²³²

Design Phase



Procurement Phase



Construction Phase



The Department also has a capital program tracker to enable the public to view by borough all DPR projects. The tracker includes information on project timeline, funding, location, associated DPR project staff, and when the tracker was last updated.²³³

“The Preliminary Mayor’s Management Report (PMMR) found the Parks Department completed 35 capital projects in the first four months of FY25, compared to 56 projects completed during the same period in FY24. This means less infrastructure improvements to city parks are being completed.”²³⁴

According to information shared by the Department, DPR “selects locations for Capital Projects based on several criteria. Funding comes from various sources, including the Mayor, Council Members, Borough Presidents, and Grantors. The selection process is highly collaborative, involving input from the community, elected officials, and agency leadership and staff.” The Department “increasingly rel[ies] on data to inform project selection.”

Key Procurement Achievements

PASSPORT

One of the biggest procurement achievements by the City was the establishment of PASSPort. PASSPort is the City's "end-to-end digital procurement platform, [that] manages every stage of the procurement process from vendor sourcing – who we purchase goods and services from to releasing and responding to solicitations, and contract award, development, registration and management."²³⁵

When building this platform, MOCS identified guiding principles and objectives to build a system that streamlined the process while also maintaining integrity and fairness.²³⁶ These principles and objects laid out the intentions of the system and were organized in the following areas: Process Improvement, Smart Use of Technology, Transparency & Accountability, and Planning & Management.²³⁷ Across these areas, MOCS identified several goals of PASSPort, including: shortening the procurement cycle times, creating a comprehensive vendor management system, internal and public-facing interfaces, business integrity controls, and the ability to manage risk.²³⁸

PASSPort was launched in the summer of 2017, which started with vendors creating and managing their online accounts, completing their vendor and principal questionnaires, identifying their capacity to do business, and allowing vendors to view and respond to performance evaluations based on their contracts with various City agencies.²³⁹ The goal of Release 1 was to begin integration for vendor profiles across City agencies, and to streamline both the vendor experience when contracting with the City, and the time between a contract award and registration.²⁴⁰

Release 2 of PASSPort, "Requisition to Pay," was launched in April 2019.²⁴¹ This phase of the system allowed for electronic invoicing and the creation of an online catalogue of vendor goods, which could be edited in real time.²⁴² Using PASSPort, vendors could upload their inventory of goods available for purchase, which agencies could then shop for online. Having an online database of goods meant that City agencies were able to easily search for needed items, and vendors could keep their product lists up-to-date, ensuring that agencies were not trying to procure items that were no longer available.²⁴³

PASSPort Release 3 was delayed due to COVID, but was launched by MOCS in June 2020.²⁴⁴ Release 3 of PASSPort allowed vendors to search through all of the City's solicitations, and gave vendors the ability to track the contract registration process through a "milestone tracker," which provided vendors with the list of remaining steps to be awarded a city contract, with check-boxes indicating where the vendor's contract is in the process.²⁴⁵

Release 4 launched in June 2021, and it offered enhanced bidding tools, including quote management for contracts under the small purchase limits; citywide invoicing and payment integration for all mayoral contracting agencies, and pre-qualification options for all eligible vendors through integration with each agency's project management systems.²⁴⁶

COUNCIL ACTION

Under Speaker Adrienne Adams' leadership, the City Council has made substantial progress in tackling deep-rooted inefficiencies in the City's procurement process, with a focus on ensuring timely and reliable payments to nonprofit contractors.

Establishing Procurement Timelines (Local Law 169 of 2023)²⁴⁷

- Mandates a comprehensive study on the time required to complete the City's procurement process

for human services contracts (due October 1, 2024).

- Requires the Procurement Policy Board to set binding procurement timelines by October 1, 2025.

Streamlining Document Management (Local Law 31 of 2024)²⁴⁸

- Creates a secure electronic “document vault” for procurement-related documents.
- Reduces duplicative paperwork and improves document accessibility.
- Expected to cut down on administrative burdens for both City agencies and nonprofit contractors.

Reducing Administrative Burdens (Local Law 85 of 2024)²⁴⁹

- Increases the threshold for review of contracts outside an agency procurement plan from \$200,000 to \$1,000,000; requires additional evidence that certain service contracts would not displace City workers; and mandates public notice at least ten days prior to certain unplanned contract actions.
- The significance of this law is that increasing the dollar threshold of review would account for the vast majority of applicable contract dollars while at the same time reducing the administrative burden, which invariably increases the procurement timeline for lower value awards.

Provide contractors with a written explanation when denying approval of a subcontractor (Local Law 105 of 2024)²⁵⁰

- Requires City agencies to provide contractors with a written explanation when denying approval of a subcontractor upon the contractor’s request.
- Agencies have 30 days to provide this explanation after receiving the request.

EXECUTIVE ACTION

In October 2014, DPR created a capital projects tracker on its website which includes an interactive map of all active DPR projects.^{251,252} The tracker is an effort by DPR to make the capital process more transparent and allow anyone to learn about the current stage of a particular capital project. The capital tracker was codified into law when the City Council passed Local Law 98 of 2015, which requires DPR to provide on its website up to date information on each funded capital project, including a detailed description of each project, the location of each project, the actual or estimated starting and completion dates of each phase of each project and the total amount of funds allocated to each project.²⁵³

Mayor Adams and former-First Deputy Mayor Lorraine Grillo established a task force in April 2022 with the goal of reviewing the City’s capital process and developing recommendations to reform the process.²⁵⁴ The task force was comprised of contractors, labor leaders, design professionals, the City Comptroller and various City agencies engaged in capital procurement. The report identified a number of recommendations, under the following major components involved in the capital construction process, with a year-end report published in 2024 outlining the status of recommendation implementation:^{255,256}

- **Improve the Project Pipeline** to better advance specific projects by properly defining the project scope and determining the status of site conditions at project locations. Use of the Capital Project Scope Development Fund should be doubled to provide more resources for early project development and investigation that will reduce the number of change orders, cost overruns and other delays. Every capital project requires a Certificate to Proceed (CP) from the Office of Management and Budget to ensure it is capitably eligible, properly funded and within the original scope for which it was approved. A standardized template should be developed for agencies to submit project information

- Update: 7 of 7 recommendations implemented. “The City has completed all 7 Task Force recommendations related to project initiation, partnering across agencies and with the Comptroller’s Office to release and implement the Task Force commitments. Together these reforms to properly define projects and streamline financial approvals help accelerate the timeline when projects kickoff, mitigate risks of project scope issues during delivery, and lay groundwork for comprehensive portfolio planning.”²⁵⁷

- | 50

Project Dashboard and broad use of contract tools for greater flexibility to manage risks and incentivize delivery across agencies. A working group across agencies in partnership with the Comptroller's Office has been developing the program for expanded work allowance, first piloted at DDC, to address known unknowns in construction and save time."²⁶⁰

Finally, on January 24, 2025, Mayor Eric Adams issued Executive Order 47, "instructing agencies that provide oversight to or directly engage in substantial contracting activities or funding arrangements with nonprofits to designate a chief nonprofit officer to report to the Mayor's Office of Nonprofit Services (MONS) and the MOCS. Each agency chief nonprofit officer will be responsible for coordinating with MONS and MOCS to improve services, provide quality customer service in response to outreach from nonprofits, and expedite payments and communications with nonprofits."²⁶¹

Issues and Concerns

There have been long-standing concerns around DPR procurement, in particular, capital projects. Some of those issues include:

- Overall efficiency of the process.
- Delays, cost overruns and lack of communication between DPR and funders of capital projects.
- The capital process for parks projects has been criticized as being inefficient and convoluted.
- Capital Projects take much longer than anticipated, which leads to them going over budget.
- Lowest bidding contractors are often not the best. There is no method to stop a contractor who has done a poor job in the past from getting rehired.
- Fiscal Year vs. Seasonal Nature of the work. Much of the nature of the work performed by DPR contractors is seasonal, and that season falls in the middle of the budget process. The seasonal nature of the work means that unexpected expenses pop up in April, May, or June, past the point where Parks staff can purchase anything with City money. A multi-year budget (or at least a multi-year, approved seasonal plan that is baselined would allow DPR contracting partners to have the flexibility they need to properly execute their contracts.
- While outside the scope of DPR, it still warrants mention, it can take OMB a long time to approve contractor hiring, meaning that when approval is given for contractors to hire staff, half of the summer season is past.

The New York State Comptroller released a report on April 5, 2024 titled, A Review of NYC Capital Project Delivery.²⁶² Highlights from this report found that the City's "capital planning process can still be enhanced to help the public understand [the] decisions" that go into "planning, tracking, monitoring and revising budgets and schedules" as part of capital planning.²⁶³ Moreover, the State Comptroller held that consistent data on City-funded projects is not easy to find; many City-funded projects are excluded from reporting requirements; and "data on budgets and schedules lack certain details that would benefit capital project monitoring."

DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

The Digital Government pillar evaluates how advanced an agency's digital government strategies, implementation, and performance are across multiple elements. An agency's efforts are reviewed within the wider framework to ascertain whether it has the capability to achieve its intended outcomes, as well as whether the agency is effectively prioritizing its resources to meet existing mandates. This Pillar draws on aspects of digital government identified by the OECD, United Nations e-Government development models, and other frameworks. It considers each agency within its strategic and legislative context.

In this section:

- *Strategic Approach*
- *Policy Levers*
- *Implementation*
- *Monitoring*

| Pillar | Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review | Rating |
|--------------------|---|--------|
| Digital Government | Strategic Approach | B |
| | Policy Levers | B |
| | Implementation | B |
| | Monitoring | B |

Focus on Digital Government

Data and digital technologies provide governments with opportunities to improve agency operations and service delivery outcomes.²⁶⁴ This Report uses the OECD term digital government to refer to the use of digital technologies as an integrated part of governments' modernization strategies to create public value.²⁶⁵ For the city of New York, the effective use of data and digital technologies can enable the continuous improvements of operations and services and reduce barriers for citizen engagement with agency services.²⁶⁶ Digital government is improved when governments appropriately embed digital technologies throughout the policy life cycle process.²⁶⁷ This means integrating digital strategies with the right policy settings to enable implementation of the intended approach, while providing adequate tools and resources to monitor whether those strategies are working as intended.

Whole-of-Government Approach

Governments and their citizens increasingly expect a public sector to be interconnected, coordinated, and to operate more as a single entity with joined-up services.²⁶⁸ Benefits can include a reduced need for government interactions (for example, through centralized government portals); fewer requirements to provide the same information more than once (due to better inter-agency coordination); and cost savings from agencies using existing resources and tools more effectively.

DPR is part of a Citywide administrative system that has been moving towards a more coordinated approach to digital government.²⁶⁹ Since 2022, the Adams Administration has consolidated the City's technology agencies and resources into the Office of Technology and Innovation.²⁷⁰ With this consolidation, OTI is central to the City's oversight and coordination of its digital government efforts. OTI is a rebranded continuation of the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DoITT), with the agency head designated as the City's Chief Technology Officer. OTI also has central authority over the Office of Cyber Command and the Office of Data Analytics as well as over all City information technology, information security, information privacy, and telecommunications.²⁷¹ For this review, OTI's relationship with DPR is therefore important in assessing DPR's digital government efforts.

Strategic Approach

Digital strategies help agencies identify and prioritize ways to leverage data and technology to improve processes and public-facing services.²⁷² A publicly available strategic plan improves transparency, encouraging public engagement, and scrutiny, which can lead to better policy outcomes that align more closely with public expectations.²⁷³

Operationally, DPR's overarching strategic framework is monitored by its Chief Strategy Officer. The Department's digital and data strategic direction is monitored, in part, by the Chief Data Officer within the Innovation and Performance Management data team, and by the Deputy Chief within Data Systems and Analytics for Environment and Planning.²⁷⁴ DPR commonly employs technologies to meet its strategic initiatives. For example, Vital Parks for All, one of three strategic plans identified by DPR in this review (launched in 2024),²⁷⁵ is part of an initiative that includes a Vital Parks system and Vital Parks Explorer map available on the Department's website.²⁷⁶ This system displays vast amounts of DPR data and is intended to simplify information delivery to assist the community in learning about access to parks as part of DPR's wider drive to improve equitable access.²⁷⁷

In this review, the Department did not identify a publicly available overarching digital government strategy that is specific to DPR. However, like all agencies, it is guided by the Citywide OTI Strategic Plan 2022 (Strategic Plan 2022) in its approach to data and technology, and in shaping its own strategic goals.^{278,279} Under its stated strategic priorities, the Strategic Plan 2022 identifies, "Advance Digital Service Delivery", as a priority for improving City and agency digital government by accelerating and simplifying the delivery of City services and modernizing supporting technologies.²⁸⁰ Another strategic priority is, "Enhance Technology Resiliency", with an aim of optimizing agency engagement and service delivery to enable partner-agency missions and innovation.

For this review, DPR's website was identified as the central component and resource for the Department in establishing its digital strategy and its mission to grow, maintain and program a world-class park system prioritizing equity, access, safety, and nature.²⁸¹ The website contains key information and digital tools concerning the Department, various online forms, links to facilities, events, programs, permit application tools, and information for becoming more involved with the parks system, among other resources.^{282,283} For example, the Vital Parks Explorer contains elements including active recreation areas, community gardens, and cooling measures, among others. Mapping tools are also used effectively on the Department's website to display various features like event locations and information about park facilities.

Through roundtables, advocate surveys, and information received from the Department, the Council heard a range of views on DPR's efforts. DPR conveyed a clear understanding of the role and importance of data and technology in improving digital government outcomes. Despite not identifying an agency-specific digital government strategy, the Department expressed general confidence in DPR's, and the City's, approach to digital government and in its use of data as a strategic asset to improve DPR's management of systems and service delivery.²⁸⁴ The Department also expressed high levels of confidence in its approach to ensuring that users are proactively placed at the center of digital service delivery through its website.²⁸⁵ Overall, the Council's review of DPR's digital services and views expressed by advocates and stakeholders generally aligned with the Department's responses. In particular, DPR's website, open data sources, and the Department's increasing use of dashboards and other related methods appeared indicative of DPR's efforts to encourage users' understanding of, access to, and participation in the parks system. Advocates generally viewed DPR as sincere in its attempts to improve engagement, while acknowledging the challenges inherent in trying to present vast amounts of information well. Notably, however, some advocates did seek, in line with views on DPR's wider strategic approach, further transparency on the

Department's overall approach to digital government.

Transparency in strategic planning helps to hold to account agencies, including their inter-agency partners, and to ensure that they are continuing to meet the needs of their community.²⁸⁶ Digitization can enhance transparency by providing the general public with new means of accessing agency information.²⁸⁷ This is important given the City's focus on coordinating its digital government efforts through OTI and the Strategic Plan 2022. To this end, the Department should continue to explore new ways to identify its digital strategic direction publicly. When legislated to do so, the Department is generally competent in this regard—such as ensuring that accessibility and language access requirements are being met.²⁸⁸ In light of the City's increasingly centralized approach to digital government improvements across agencies, and in producing a public-facing approach to digital government delivery, the Department could benefit from expressly linking its digital goals to the City's efforts as expressed through the Strategic Plan 2022. This approach could help:

- Signal the Administration's attempts at joined-up government;
- Aid the Administration in meeting its stated OTI roadmap of priorities for digital government;²⁸⁹ and
- Enable DPR to articulate more clearly how its approach to digital government will progressively improve its ability to meet the needs of the community.

Publicly articulating its strategic approach would also provide greater clarity to the general public.

Policy Levers

Policy levers include any laws, tools, resources, or other mechanisms that encourage or enable implementation of a government's strategic approach.²⁹⁰ Policy levers are an important element within the policy life cycle because they create the enabling environment for agencies to meet their proposed digital strategic direction.²⁹¹ To be effective, a digital strategic framework requires sufficient resourcing, staff, and funding to achieve intended outcomes. Legislatively, the City's strategic framework encompasses a range of local laws that mandate or promote the use of digital technologies across agencies, including: the City's Open Data Law;²⁹² laws relating to website accessibility and related reporting requirements;²⁹³ Citywide language access requirements;²⁹⁴ and agency-specific laws that require technologies such as DPR's annual street tree inspections mandate that requires the posting and maintaining of certain information on the Department's website.²⁹⁵

To assess DPR's use of available policy levers, the Council reviewed recent reporting requirements, the MMR, and recent fiscal budgets together with feedback received from the Department and from relevant advocates and stakeholders. As with this review's consideration of the City's and DPR's overall strategic approach, DPR expressed high levels of confidence in its capacity to meet existing Departmental responsibilities and in its use of its organizational structures to enable implementation of its digital strategic direction.²⁹⁶ DPR also went to great lengths to note the role that different teams, sub-division staff, and technologies play in meeting its strategic approach. Legislatively, DPR has comparatively few reporting responsibilities to maintain digital systems or platforms compared with some other agencies. Nevertheless, digital technologies and data play an important role in the Department's delivery of its services including Vital Parks for All, its Parks Inspection Program (PIP), and various other tools like its NYC Tree Map and the Tree and Stump Removal dashboard. DPR's development and use of these tools, particularly the Vital Parks for All initiative, suggests a Departmental understanding of the importance of that digital initiatives play in achieving its strategic direction.

Overall, while advocates were mostly concerned with non-digital service delivery outcomes, their general views on DPR's policies and procedures to achieve to its strategic approach were positive and aligned with DPR's own confidence in its operations and adherence to laws. DPR also expressed confidence in the availability of resources, tools, and funding; answering positively that such mechanisms were sufficiently available from the Administration to maintain, support, develop, and meet the Department's future digital needs. This confidence on funding and resource allocation notably differed from a majority of advocates' feedback, which noted concerns over DPR's lack of funding in other areas, and the Department's perceived staffing issues. More clearly articulating its digital direction would provide DPR with a framework expressing the Department's ability to meet its current technological needs. This would help the public and the Administration to understand how well DPR is set up to achieve its objectives.

Although outside the scope of DPR's mandate, this review found that while the City has multiple initiatives outside of the Strategic Plan 2022, such as the DigitalBlueprintNYC²⁹⁷ and the Digital Playbook,²⁹⁸ some efforts are either expressly out of date or they do not contain sufficient policy levers to encourage agencies to actually use them. DPR's successful completion of its mandated reporting requirements for accessibility and language access provide one possible reporting mechanism for improving DPR's digital strategic planning. Publicly linking the Department's approach with the City's Strategic Plan 2022 by DPR expressing how it intends to improve its use of data and technology, would help the City and the Department to better coordinate their efforts through the Strategic Plan 2022.

Implementation

Implementation is most effective when a strategic approach is user-focused and when it closely reflects the needs of the community over processes in achieving its ends.²⁹⁹ Within the City's digital strategic framework, DPR has broad authority to determine how it works as an agency to implement its various tools and systems.³⁰⁰ DPR's website is central to these efforts through its hosting of key information and systems including Vital Parks for All, the PIP, and various other tools. As this review identifies, OTI's City User Experience Design Guidelines note that an agency's website should deliver timely, reliable, official, accessible, and authoritative information.

Most parks advocates and stakeholders raised concerns over DPR's lack of transparency in understanding how the Department establishes its strategic priorities, as well as its perceived top-down approach to strategic planning and decision making. In terms of implementation of digital tools, while DPR's website, in particular the Vital Parks Explorer, is clearly a useful tool, the Department could benefit from continuing to improve the presentation of the sources of information it provides. For example, DPR could consider working to house all of its different digital strategic initiatives, dashboards, and other tools in one place on its website. For each digital initiative on its website, DPR should also consider identifying: the subdivision of DPR that completed it; whether it was completed to meet an intended strategic priority (either in its strategic plan or its digital strategy); whether it was completed to meet a legislative requirement; and how the initiative helps to achieve the City's overarching digital strategic approach and specific priorities. These suggestions could help the Department to better justify its data and technology efforts in terms of resource allocations and help advocates to understand how each initiative fits within the Department's wider efforts.

Monitoring

Monitoring mechanisms may be mandatory (for example, through statutory reporting requirements) or promoted by agencies through processes that actively gauge user experience of an agency's services.³⁰¹ Effective monitoring systems can help governments and their agencies to identify weaknesses and

improve future policy design.³⁰² The numerous reporting obligations on City agencies are just one example of a mechanism for monitoring agency operations and particular service delivery outcomes.

DPR appeared confident in its use of digital feedback tools and other methods to identify issues with current online services. DPR recognizes the role of community engagement for improving services and expressed general awareness of the importance of ensuring that there are adequate resources and tools available to track and evaluate its implementation of its strategic approach. DPR also acknowledged its use of technologies in community outreach noting that DPR uses its website, social media and its 'membership management system', the latter of which communicates information via email to various constituents. DPR also identified its ability to analyze and link trends in attendance to various programs to plan for each season more effectively.

Despite the Department's confidence, the Council heard mixed responses from advocates on its outreach to those in the community with limited access to technologies. While the Department seems to be working relatively well, some advocates noted that communication was not proactive enough. In reviewing the DPR website, it appeared to have a variety of means for receiving community feedback. The Department would benefit from taking a continuous improvement approach in its community outreach efforts, and using this to continuously explore new ways to engage and receive feedback. This will help the Department to ensure that it is meeting users where they are as technologies continue to evolve.

MEASUREMENT, ANALYSIS, AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management pillar measures the agency's compliance with Open Data laws, the City Charter, and relevant local laws. This review also assesses the Mayor's Management Report targets, performance results, and any information gaps.

For the review of an agency's reporting obligations and compliance with the City's Open Data Laws,³⁰³ the pilot framework draws on aspects of the three main facets from the OECD's Open, Useful, and Re-usable data (OURdata) Index: data availability, data accessibility, and government support for reuse.³⁰⁴

Additionally, the framework uses established best practices in performance measurement to review an agency's performance indicators listed in the Mayor's Management Report.

In this section:

- *Reporting and Data Availability*
- *MMR Review and Evaluation*

| Pillar | Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review | Rating |
|---|---|--------|
| Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management | Reporting and Data Availability | B |
| | MMR Review and Evaluation | B |

Reporting and Data Availability

The OECD's Open, Useful, and Re-usable data (OURdata) Index focuses on three core areas to foster open government: data availability, data accessibility, and government support for reuse.³⁰⁵ Ensuring “access to timely, relevant, and high-quality data to foster resilience and facilitate a comprehensive whole-of-society response” is a good governance principle established by the OECD,³⁰⁶ and it assists in building data-driven “transparent and accessible” strategies.³⁰⁷ Several elements can be used to accomplish this such as data, surveys, progress reports, evaluations, and fiscal reports. DPR houses all of its reporting in one of three places: NYC OpenData (OpenData), NYC Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS), and the DPR website. All agency reports listed in OpenData are reports that either the agency has chosen to make publicly available or contain any data or tables, while all reports housed in the DORIS online library have been mandated by local law.^{308,309}

Data

In support of an agency's “transparent and accessible strategy,” OECD recommends proactively making clear, timely, reliable, and relevant public sector data and other information available.³¹⁰ DPR makes a significant amount of data available through OpenData and several agency web pages.

DPR adheres to the City's OpenData Laws and reporting requirements to ensure that public sector data is accessible. Of the 144 datasets available on OpenData, 31 are marked as historical, and the remaining active datasets and maps (113) are updated at varying rates (e.g., daily, quarterly, annually, as needed).³¹¹ DPR adheres to the Technical Standards Manual guidelines to determine the frequency of updates.³¹² The agency has also reported internally working with divisions responsible for maintaining the data to determine what datasets make the “most sense” to update, as how often a division updates the data influences its availability.³¹³

The datasets available on OpenData span park management, facilities, natural resources, and operational activities. While some datasets provide information on features or resources in New York City, such as Parks Properties (property under the jurisdiction of DPR) or List of Preserves and Natural Areas (identifies areas in NYC Parks with the most significant natural habitat); other datasets provide information on work being completed by DPR, such as PIP and Asset Management Parks System (AMPS).³¹⁴ PIP provides data on the annual inspections DPR conducts, “capturing data on litter, benches, athletic fields, horticultural areas, and other amenities in ... parks.”³¹⁵ The data collection includes fifteen datasets, some examples include: All Sites (MAPPED), Conditions and Hazards, and Public Restroom Inspections.³¹⁶ All Sites (MAPPED), which is available in list and map formats, includes properties eligible for inspection and geographic data. The Conditions and Hazards dataset lists hazards and unacceptable conditions from property inspections. Lastly, Public Restroom Inspections provides the inspection ratings of restrooms.³¹⁷

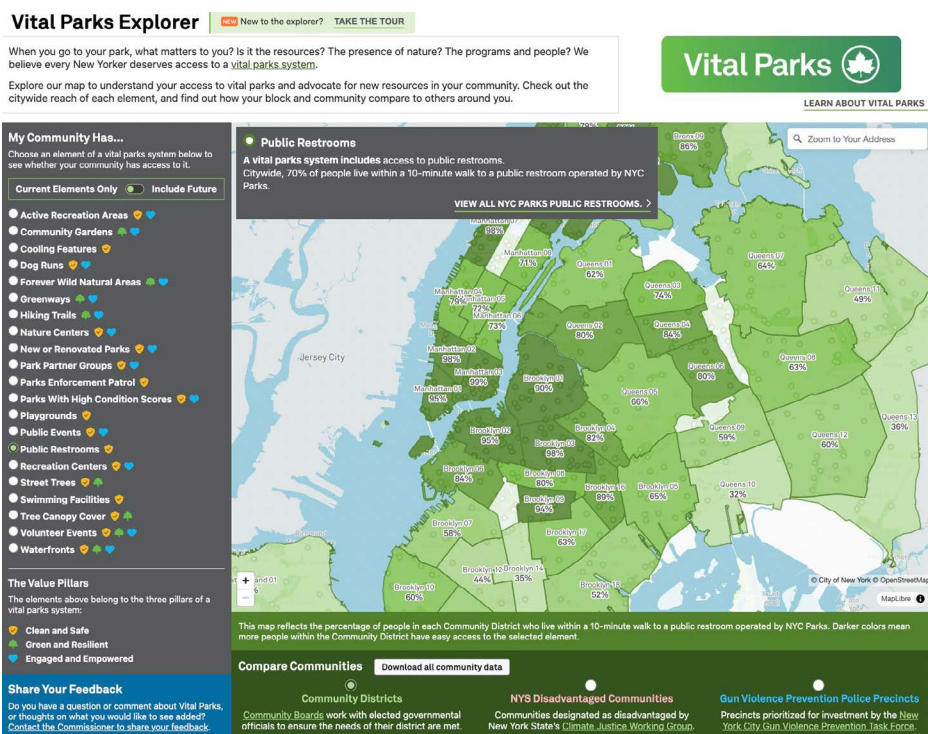
AMPS is a tool NYC Parks uses to track and manage work orders, and park users can use this data collection to understand what repairs are completed at a park and when they are finished. AMPS data, in combination with the

Daily Tasks dataset, is used to create the Annual Report on Park Maintenance.³¹⁸ There are six datasets included in this data collection: Work Orders, Assets, Labor, Transactions, Transaction Details, and Comments. The Work Orders dataset is the “primary table for information about work orders.”³¹⁹ It contains a description of the work, assigned title, request date, and completion date for each work order. The Assets dataset catalogs items such as equipment, buildings, parks, maintenance districts, and boroughs. The Labor dataset contains work order labor records. The Transactions dataset monitors each transaction: the “movement of parts and materials between store houses and work orders.”³²⁰ The Transaction Details dataset provides information about each part involved in a transaction. The final dataset, Comments, includes all comments for each of the AMPS datasets.³²¹

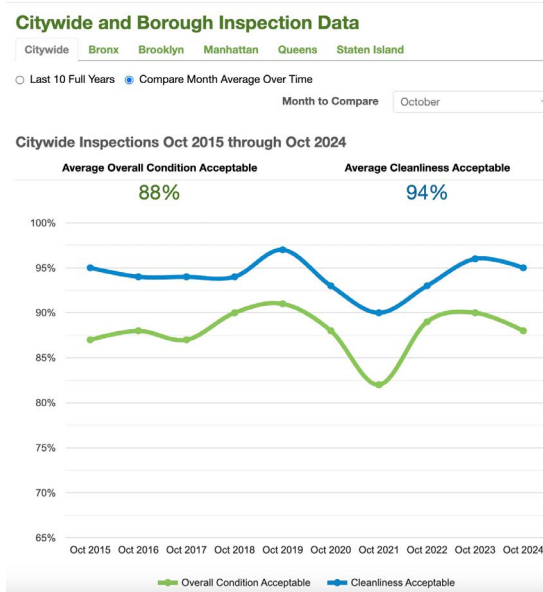
The AMPS data collection is structured to enable DPR to drill down into a specific work order and understand all costs and the current labor status. However, designing the system in this way has resulted in a highly complicated collection of data that is difficult for external users (e.g., park users and the public at large) to access and understand. To address this, DPR created a User Guide and Data Dictionary to support its AMPS data collection on OpenData. This solution is still difficult for external users to fully comprehend without clear training. Additionally, a 2024 audit of indoor recreation centers by the New York City Comptroller’s office found that DPR “staff did not consistently conduct and record the results of their daily inspections” into AMPS.³²²

In Focus: Asset Management Parks System (AMPS)

Beyond its OpenData requirements, the accessibility of public sector data can also be reviewed through data sharing on DPR’s website. Dashboards available on DPR websites enable users to review information about DPR’s operations and parks and are presented in clear and easy to understand methods. However, they are scattered across different webpages and are not clearly advertised. Some example dashboards include:



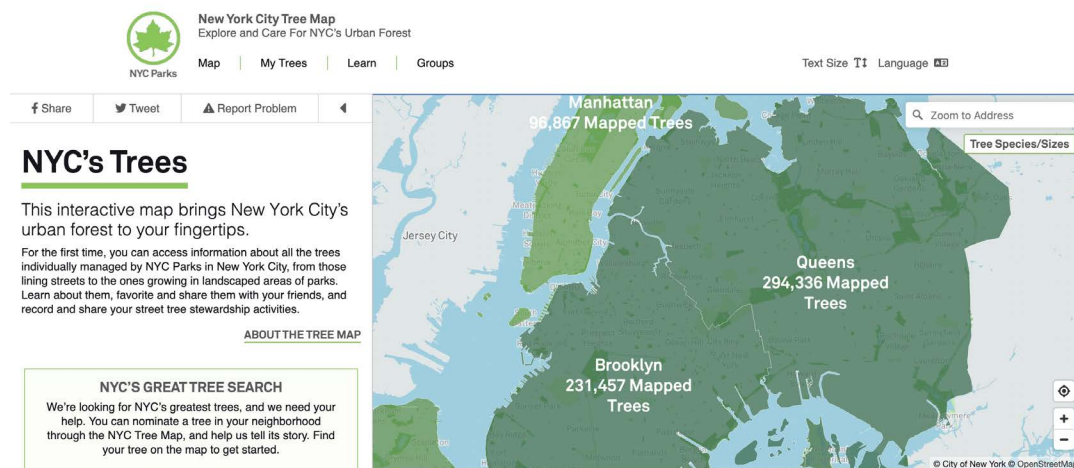
- **Vital Parks Explorer**, launched in 2024, draws on data aggregated and analyzed by DPR and displays it through an interactive digital map. As part of the Vital Parks for All initiative, this tool provides data on 21 elements (e.g., New or Renovated Parks, Community Gardens, Street Trees, and Public Restrooms) that fall under three pillars that DPR believes make up a “vital parks system”: that a park is Clean and Safe, Green and Resilient, and Engaged and Empowered. Each community district element is measured based on the percentage of people in an area who have easy access to it and users can drill down into each community district to assess its performance³²³

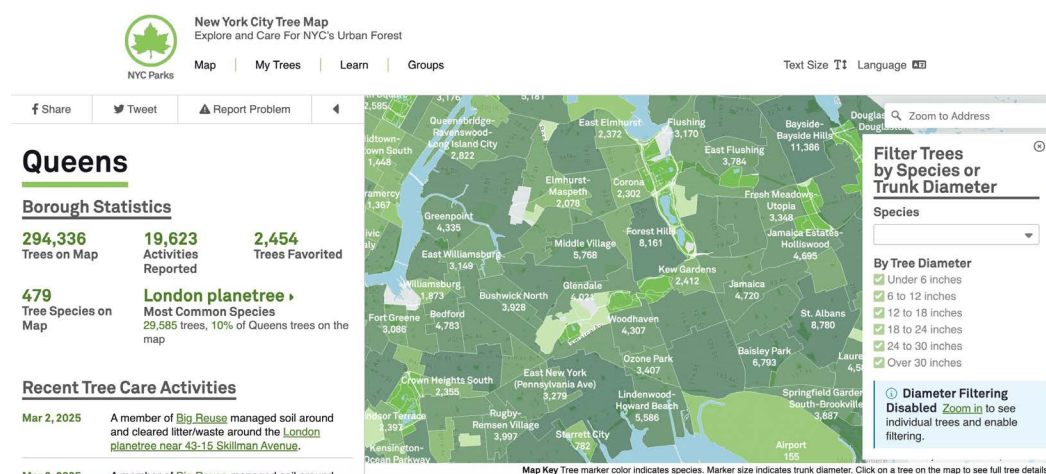


- **Parks Inspection Program (PIP)** is “a comprehensive, outcome-based performance measurement system that generates frequent, random, and detailed inspections of [DPR] parks and playgrounds.” The overall condition and cleanliness rating of inspections is available by borough and citywide. Users can also search for parks of interest to find drilled-down results for the last ten inspections.³²⁴

- **Capital Project Tracker** is a DPR public tool that maps out capital projects and indicates a project's current status. When looking at an individual project, park users can also review the project purpose,

current status and recent updates, estimated completion dates and project delays, and funding sources. Users can search for projects by borough, park name, project phase, or funding source using the map or browse projects by borough or citywide.³²⁵





- **NYC Tree Map** is where park users can find detailed information (e.g., tree species, sizes, addresses, benefits) about all trees individually managed by DPR, including street trees and those in parks. Launched in December 2022, the “living tree map” offers users the ability to see a tree’s most recent inspection and any scheduled or recently completed work orders.^{326,327}
- **Tree and Stump Removal** and **Sidewalk Repair** dashboards include data on DPR’s management of dead, damaged, and hazardous tree removal as well as how it addresses sidewalk damage caused by City tree roots. Both dashboards have a searchable map, table, and downloadable data indicating work that took place over the past six months and future scheduled work.^{328,329}

DPR can also enhance transparency through sharing data externally. In addition to its website, DPR data and information exchange methods include participation in Citywide working groups task forces and through various public-facing engagements, including Community Board meetings, City Council hearings, and Citywide publications.³³⁰ Feedback regarding DPR’s data availability and uses shows additional data could be collected or be made publicly available. Advocate feedback highlighted that additional data regarding staffing numbers, vacancies, hiring process length, turnover rates, and work hours required for various park-related tasks would be helpful for themselves and other partner organizations.³³¹ There is also an opportunity to provide greater real-time information concerning adverse conditions, emergency maintenance, and staffing challenges beyond what is posted on DPR’s Notices webpage,³³² with an advocate noting that “DPR isn’t on top of the day-of or weekend-of updates” and provided an example of when “a lifeguard calls out and they have to close the pool.”³³³

Further, additional resources could enhance data collection for park monitoring and evaluation, as discussed in the 2023 1% for Parks Impact report published by New Yorkers For Parks.³³⁴ While DPR has established performance measurement tools, like PIP, expanding data collection efforts through year-round park visitation tracking and community surveys could help DPR better assess park accessibility and user experiences.³³⁵

Reports, Surveys, and Evaluations

OECD has found that organizations can achieve transparency and accessibility by publicly making the results of surveys, consultations, reports, and evaluations available.³³⁶ DPR has several reporting obligations under City, State, and occasionally Federal laws. These obligations may require an agency to produce a plan, report, or other information and submit it to the Mayor and the Council or publish certain information on the agency's website or other means. DPR has 18 unique reporting mandates identified relevant to this review, and of those, DPR submitted just over two thirds of its required reports in FY24.³³⁷ Some examples of these reporting requirements include:

- **Local Law 73 of 2015** requires DPR to submit an annual report (ADA Standards Accessible Design Report) detailing the accessibility of park facilities for individuals with disabilities, including assessments and planned improvements, each year.³³⁸
- **Local Law 98 of 2015** requires DPR to publish an Annual Report on Park Maintenance, which outlines how staff work is distributed across the parks system. As discussed earlier, AMPS is one of the data sources supporting this annual report.³³⁹

In addition to these mandated reporting requirements, agency data can be accessed over the other publicly available elements. The agency publishes evaluation results through DPR's performance measurement system, PIP. PIP generates "frequent, random, and detailed inspections of parks and buildings," and DPR conducts approximately 6,000 inspections each year.^{340,341} Inspected properties are rated "Acceptable" (A) or "Unacceptable" (U) for their condition and cleanliness.³⁴² The specific thresholds (amounts, sizes, percentages) for unacceptability for each feature are described in detail in the NYC Parks Inspection Manual. All inspections are reviewed by administrative staff for accuracy and consistency, and inspectors are provided with regular feedback, reminders, and refreshers. Basic inspection results (dates and failed features) are available on DPR's website, and tables with all inspection line items are available on OpenData.³⁴³

The third element an agency can make publicly available is the results of surveys. In the Council's agency survey for this report, DPR reported it "distributes surveys" and "gathers anecdotal feedback from individuals utilizing the services provided" to engage with community members to understand program setbacks, issues, or demand for services. However, the results of any surveys could not be identified online in this review.

Fiscal Reports

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is a financial agency of the United Nations that uses a framework of international economic cooperation and is supported by 190 member countries. The fiscal transparency code it operates under is widely recognized as the international standard for the disclosure of public financial information.^{344,345} Their Fiscal Transparency Handbook states that fiscal reporting "should provide a comprehensive, relevant, timely, and reliable overview of the government's financial position and performance."³⁴⁶

- **Local Law 16 of 2015** mandates that DPR report annually on funding and donations provided to the agency by non-governmental entities.³⁴⁷
- **Local Law 98 of 2015** also mandates the agency reports payroll data on an annual basis, as well as the total amount of funds allocated for each capital project under the agency's jurisdiction and each source of funding for each capital project.^{348,349}

While the aforementioned mandated reports are financially related, they do not specifically speak to DPR's overall financial position and performance. After thoroughly examining all mandatory and voluntary reports, it is clear that outside of the annual City budget process and the fiscal reporting that entails, DPR does not provide publicly available reports related to its financial position and performance.

MMR Review and Evaluation

The metrics included in DPR's Mayor's Management Report serve as the agency's key performance indicators (KPIs). Creating clear KPIs and connecting them to specific targets is crucial for ensuring that an organization's objectives are effectively measured, monitored, and achieved. OECD recommends setting "measurable objectives and targets" for its services and ensuring these are linked to key performance indicators.³⁵⁰ DPR "reviews and revisits" these objectives and targets for the MMR at least once a year.³⁵¹

DPR's MMR is divided into four services: managing parks and recreation facilities; managing street, park, and forest trees; preserving and expanding park system infrastructure; and providing recreational and educational opportunities.³⁵²

- **Managing the City's parks and recreation facilities** is based upon goals related to park conditions, cleanliness, and public safety. Parks rated acceptable for overall condition was 85 percent and parks rated acceptable for cleanliness was 92 percent in the first four months of Fiscal 2025, decreases compared to the same period in Fiscal 2024 when overall condition was at 88 percent and cleanliness was at 94 percent. **The drop in overall condition and cleanliness ratings was largely due to the loss of "second shift" staff through recent City budget reductions at 100 heavily used locations during the summer of 2024.**³⁵³ This loss was not reversed until fall 2024, as the result of the Council's budget restoration.³⁵⁴

The City Council was able to restore \$23.7 million of proposed cuts to Parks funding in the FY25 budget, including \$15 million to enhance and restore funding for Second Shift maintenance and cleaning positions at hot spots in city parks.

- **Managing the city's street, park, and forest trees** incorporates both the maintenance and planting of trees and the ability for DPR to respond to high-priority tree work immediately. Tree inspections saw a 78 percent increase from 80,187 in FY23 to 142,656 in FY24. Reviewing the most recent fiscal year, DPR cited consultant contract issues as to why this KPI fluctuated between fiscal years. Trees planted have also experienced a steady increase in the past few years, and, in FY24, DPR has planted its highest number of trees since FY20 (just over 42,000). Of the trees planted in FY24, DPR planted the most in city streets (16,129) and natural areas of parks (21,365). **In contrast, there has been a decrease in tree removals over the past five fiscal years. DPR experienced its "lowest number of trees removed in over a decade" in FY24: 9,548 trees removed in FY24, a four percent decrease compared to FY23 and a 19 percent decrease from FY21.**³⁵⁵ DPR cites that the number of tree removals is influenced "by storm events, and New York City did not experience any major storms in Fiscal 2024."³⁵⁶

The City Council was able to restore \$23.7 million of proposed cuts to Parks funding in the FY25 budget, including \$8.7 million to support Urban Park Rangers, Tree Stump Removal, and Green Thumb Restoration.

- **To preserve and expand the infrastructure of New York's park system**, the agency measures capital project progress (completion and budget), the supply of parkland to meet future needs, and the acres of natural areas cared for. The maintenance of natural areas is a recent KPI tracked by DPR with FY23 being the first year it was reported. This goal was added to "highlight performance goals related to natural areas restoration and stewardship."³⁵⁷ Both KPIs, acres of natural areas cared for and the number of native plants (non-trees) planted in natural areas, decreased in FY24. In FY23, 1,224 acres of natural areas were cared for, decreasing to 787 acres in FY24. In FY23, just

over 57,000 native plants were planted in natural areas, decreasing slightly to nearly 52,000 plants in FY24.³⁵⁸

- **When measuring recreational and educational opportunities for New Yorkers of all ages,** DPR focuses on attendance at educational programs, recreation centers, and other venues and volunteer activities. Attendance and membership at recreation centers have steadily increased year over year. Memberships totaled 100,385 in FY22, 117,116 in FY23, and reached 141,486 in FY24. Similarly, attendance totaled 776,001 in FY22, 1,647,046 in FY23, and 1,870,379 in FY24. Attendance at pools, museums, and skating rinks fluctuated more over these three fiscal years but has overall been slowly increasing.³⁵⁹

DPR has consistently met or exceeded performance targets in several key metrics. For example, the target for parks rated “acceptable” for the overall condition was set at 85 percent and ratings exceeded this reaching 89 percent. Additionally, the target for capital projects completed on time or early was 80 percent, and DPR completed 85 percent of these projects in FY24.³⁶⁰ However, for many of DPR’s KPIs, the target KPIs have remained unchanged year over year, including for these two examples. For both parks rated acceptable and for the overall condition capital projects completed on time or early, the associated targets have remained at 85 percent despite meeting or exceeding this goal each year since FY21 and remain the same on the FY25 Preliminary MMR.^{361,362} This suggests that targets are being set conservatively and remain within achievable thresholds rather than being adjusted for continuous improvement. Research suggests this may not push the agency to improve its performance as “[p]erformance may not improve substantially if targets are set only slightly above the already achieved level. An easy target is unlikely to inspire or motivate managers to improve public services.”³⁶³

In contrast, one metric related to forestry management, street trees pruned, has not been met consistently. A total of 54,448 street trees were pruned in FY24. As highlighted by the MMR, this is “the most [street trees pruned] since Fiscal 2020 and an 18 percent improvement from last year.”³⁶⁴ However, this accounted for 84 percent of their target of 65,000, which was also not met in the past three fiscal years (67 percent, 71 percent, and 84 percent performance in FY22, FY23, and FY24, respectively). While pruning contract registration delays were cited as the reason for not meeting their target in FY24, indicating potential operational challenges rather than oversetting targets, a review of their target-setting process will help determine if there are more justifiable targets.

By reviewing the FY24 MMR, existing information gaps can also be identified. While the MMR provides a vast amount of valuable data, most of the KPIs used in the MMR do not have a target associated with it making performance not easily discernable for readers. Further, while the MMR includes one metric under “adequate supply of parkland to meet future needs” that connects to the Vital Parks for All project, it does not provide other data summarized in the Vital Parks Explorer.

The Council, through its grading under this pillar, acknowledges DPR’s attempts to embed a continuous improvement approach in its activities and to reflect those achievements through appropriate performance targets in the MMR. At the same time, the Department must avoid conservatively setting targets, by working to identify when targets are no longer challenging to achieve, or when they cease to adequately address the wider context in which they sit, and to continuously adjust them accordingly.

In Focus: Managing Trees

New Yorkers can submit tree service requests to DPR to address issues related to city-managed trees and sidewalks. These include removing dead or fallen trees or repairing sidewalks damaged by tree roots.³⁶⁵ DPR's two-way integration with 311 enables requests to be submitted by phone, 311's website or mobile app, and via the DPR "Tree Service Request" or "NYC Street Tree Map" webpages. Request data from 311 update the Forestry Management System (ForMS) 2.0, which tracks DPR's work on trees.³⁶⁶

DPR exhibited mixed performance in responding to forestry-related 311 service requests in FY24. While 81 percent of fallen branch or limb requests were addressed within the eight-day target—an improvement from 73 percent in FY23—this still falls short of the 95 percent target set. Similarly, dead/dying tree removals improved slightly compared to previous years, with 72 percent meeting the target in FY24 (compared to 53 percent in FY21). The most critical backlog remains root, sewer, and sidewalk condition issues where only 30 percent of requests met the 30-day response time.³⁶⁷

While DPR has improved response times for certain forestry-related requests, overall performance has remained inconsistent, particularly for non-emergency services. Ensuring efficient responses to forestry service requests is especially important as park users are submitting the requests. Status updates are emailed to the submitting user for service requests with an email associated with them. Though certain programs prioritize addressing high-risk conditions first, like the Tree Risk Management Program,³⁶⁸ it is essential for DPR to meet response targets across all categories to ensure efficient service delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendations

Leadership, Strategy, and Direction

1. The Department of Parks and Recreation should work towards releasing its strategic plan in regular intervals and include the following information:
 - A. An outline of the Department's strategic priorities;
 - B. The period to which the information relates; and
 - C. A statement of responsibility for the information contained in such plan signed by the Commissioner of the Department.
2. In releasing a regular strategic plan, the Department should consider including the following metrics:
 - A. The nature and scope of DPR's functions and responsibilities in relation to its intended operations.
 - B. How DPR intends to manage its functions and meet its responsibilities to achieve or contribute towards achieving its strategic priorities.
 - C. Setting out any other information as reasonably necessary to achieve an understanding of DPR's capability to achieve or contribute to its strategic priorities.
 - D. Setting out any responsibilities that DPR has to the Mayor, or any other agency, in relation to its intended operations.
 - E. Identifying any divisions, sub-departments, or other sub-divisions that the Department intends to direct to achieve or contribute to its strategic priorities.
 - F. Identifying any agencies of the City, stakeholders, and any public or private organizations the Department intends to coordinate with to achieve or contribute to its strategic priorities.

Service Delivery for New Yorkers

3. The Department of Parks and Recreation should ensure it is prioritizing the needs of vulnerable and marginalized communities:
 - A. DPR should guarantee all electronically downloadable forms are available in all designated citywide languages.
 - B. DPR should work with advocates and providers to expand low-cost outreach methods to reach users without access to technology.
 - C. While the City Council enacted Local Law 103 of 2023 to make memberships for recreation centers under the jurisdiction of the Department of Parks and Recreation free for young adults between 18 and 24 years old, to further increase program accessibility for low-income households, DPR should provide reduced recreational memberships for households below a certain income threshold.

- D. DPR should explore partnerships with non-profits and private entities to improve parks users' access to programs with limited availability (e.g. swim teams, sports teams, summer camps, etc.).
 - E. An environmental justice area denotes a geographic area that has experienced disproportionate negative impacts from environmental pollution due to historical and existing social inequities without equal protection and enforcement of environmental laws and regulations, which can be a result of governmental under-investment. To strengthen the agency's existing initiatives to invest in these under-resourced communities, DPR should incorporate a focus on improving parkland areas under DPR's jurisdiction in these environmental justice areas.
 - F. DPR should meet with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to determine the funds necessary for the agency to enhance accessibility in capital projects and programs for persons who are disabled and secure more funding to develop parks, open spaces, and recreation centers in low-income neighborhoods.
4. The Department of Parks and Recreation should focus on improving agency communications on new or updated information.
- A. DPR should utilize social media posts and website banners to improve communication on immediate updates and increase user visibility.
 - B. To improve overall agency proactivity on service, facility, or program information, DPR should collaborate with partner organizations or parks advocates to increase the agency's reach.
5. The Department of Parks and Recreation should reevaluate the Walk-to-a-Park initiative using only park access points.

Relationships and Collaboration

- 6. The Department of Parks and Recreation should create a more accessible, organized, and efficient process for obtaining an operating agreement, while also working towards standardizing agreements/contract documents.
- 7. To improve communication with parks partners and advocacy groups, the Department of Parks and Recreation should designate a point of contact for each organization to streamline communication and ensure organizational communication needs are met.

Workforce Development

- 8. The Department of Parks and Recreation should consider identifying and explaining the optimal number of employees it will require to meet its strategic priorities, with caveats for the seasonal nature of their work and requirements for longer-term projects. Such information could be provided as part of the Department's provision of regular multi-year information on its strategic priorities.

Financial and Resources Management

- 9. The Department of Parks and Recreation should improve its Capital Project Tracker by enabling the public to see if projects are over, on, or under budget in the following categories, organized based on percent change from the original budget to the current plan:
 - A. Excessively Over Budget (20 percent or more)

- B. Significantly Over Budget (at least 10 percent but less than 20 percent)
- C. Over Budget (more than 0 percent but less than 10 percent)
- D. On Budget (no change in planned spending)
- E. Under Budget (current plan is any amount less than the original budget)
- F. Incomplete Data (project does not report an original budget)

Digital Government

10. The Department of Parks and Recreation should:

- A. Make its strategic plan publicly available online, include information on how the its strategic approach to digital government forms part of a collaborative citywide strategic approach to improving digital government;
- B. Continue to proactively explore ways to articulate how it intends to implement its digital government strategic approach. This information could help inform public understand on its current efforts;
- C. Explore ways to present its various agency platforms and other digital tools in a consolidated way on its website, preferable in one place, with sufficient contextual information to link them to the Department's wider direction;
- D. Explore, within its limited resources, leveraging its relationships with agencies such as OTI to get better targeted feedback on the community's needs, including improved regular monitoring of users' experiences through its online platforms; and
- E. Continue to explore ways to maintain a continuous improvement approach to determine how to improve engagement with the community by monitoring existing efforts (such as surveys, online feedback forms, and other means) and making regular findings on how those efforts can be better tailored to the community, using digital tools.

Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

11. While the Department of Parks and Recreation has a large amount of data published on its website, the Department should consider making additional data available. Engaging park users on what additional dashboards would be beneficial and help DPR learn what information or updates are important to visitors and advocates. It would also help continue to make their wide range of OpenData datasets more accessible to users who don't frequently use this site. The following three information sources or datasets are some ideal places to start a usability and feasibility of streamlining review:

- A. **AMPS Dashboard.** Similar to the PIP dashboard, a user-friendly and easily accessible web page for park users to check on the status of work orders.
- B. **Public Restrooms.** This map could be enhanced to include data from the Public Restroom Individual Room Inspections dataset on OpenData (currently referenced on the webpage) to indicate progress on any work orders, inspections, or current closures.
- C. **Park and Facility Closures.** The public facing page highlighting park and facility closures should integrate other DPR databases to provide greater real-time updates for park users, and also

integrate historical data to identify areas of needed improvement.

12. As the agency continues to improve its performance management systems, such as AMPS, the Department of Parks and Recreation should evaluate how to maximize the public utility of the data collected, while also streamlining and improving the user interfaces for front-line staff responsible for entering these data.

Appendix A

Scope and Methodology

Statutory Authority and Scope

The scope of the authority for the inaugural assessments conducted under this framework is pursuant to the Council's Charter-mandated powers. New York City Charter Section 29 provides the Council the ability to "investigate any matters within its jurisdiction" and "review ... the activities of the agencies of the city, including their service goals and performance and management efficiency."³⁶⁹ As part of the Council's legislative professional staff, the assessment team is empowered by Charter Section 47 to "assist ... in [the] review of the performance and management of city agencies."³⁷⁰ Charter Section 1128 requires agency and administration officials to cooperate with any investigation conducted pursuant to the Charter.³⁷¹

Methodology

For the inaugural round of the Report Card Initiative, the Council focused on three areas of information collection: advocate engagement, agency engagement, and independent research.

For engaging advocates, the Council used non-statistical sampling approaches to provide conclusions on advocate sentiment and recommendations. The assessment team selected judgmental samples based on "professional judgment, expertise, and knowledge."³⁷² However, due to this non-statistical sampling approach, the assessment team did not project these conclusions and recommendations to reflect the total advocate population. The samples consist of in-person roundtables with advocates and written surveys of advocates concerning agency performance. As circumstances permitted, the Council engaged advocates in follow-up meetings to gain further insight into the topics raised as part of our standard outreach.

For engaging agencies, the assessment team also used non-statistical agency surveys with two sets of requests for written responses. The second round of agency questions focused on the seven pillars of the framework, detailed below. While these requests were issued to each agency, the assessment team understood that different offices and departments throughout the Administration vetted these responses before submission to the Council. As such, agency responses were viewed with a whole-of-Administration lens. The assessment team also issued data requests and requests for follow-up meetings with agency subject matter experts. Additionally, requests for information were issued to supporting offices throughout the Administration.

As part of the analysis of agency performance and capability, the assessment team identified areas of focus for each agency assessed, including recommendations for areas of performance to improve weaknesses and resolve inefficiencies.

Organizational Analysis

The framework centers around seven pillars:

- Leadership, Strategy, and Direction
- Service Delivery for New Yorkers
- Relationships and Collaboration
- Workforce Development
- Financial and Resources Management

- Digital Government
- Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

Within each pillar, the framework allows for more detailed analysis using best practices from sources such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO).^{373,374}

While the framework considers current agency performance, weight was also given to an agency's demonstrated capability to deliver improved services in the foreseeable future. The framework accomplishes this by adapting performance-based elements from the Baldrige Excellence Framework and other commonly-used public sector performance measurement approaches, while also using capability-based elements from the aforementioned New Zealand and Australia models, along with parts of frameworks used in Europe,³⁷⁵ the United Kingdom,³⁷⁶ Canada,³⁷⁷ Ireland,³⁷⁸ and South Korea,³⁷⁹ amongst others.

Leadership, Strategy, and Direction

The Leadership, Strategy, and Direction pillar focuses on the capability of the agency's leadership to properly steer the agency and prepare for the future. This review evaluates how the executive team and the agency as a whole develop, implement, and adhere to its mission, vision, values, and strategies.

| Pillar | Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review | Description of the Indicator |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| Leadership, Strategy, and Direction | Leadership and Governance | How an agency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides direction and communicates its mission, vision, and values Develops a framework for decision-making and establishing a chain of command |
| | Strategy Development | How an agency considers strategic advantages, disadvantages, and risks during the development of its strategic plan |
| | Strategy Implementation | How an agency deploys and modifies its strategic plan |

Service Delivery for New Yorkers

The Service Delivery for New Yorkers pillar encompasses the accessibility, inclusivity, and availability of all agency services. This review measures how well the agency is accounting for and meeting the needs of the community using the resources available to the agency.

| Pillar | Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review | Description of the Indicator |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Service Delivery for New Yorkers | Equity | How well an agency accounts for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusivity of services and resources Consistent and systematic treatment of all individuals in a fair, just, and impartial manner |
| | Access | How well an agency accounts for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical accessibility of services and resources Availability of assistance Plans to mitigate and reduce programmatic barriers Program and resource adaptability |
| | Meeting Demand | How well an agency assesses and meets the needs of the community |

Relationships and Collaboration

The Relationships and Collaboration pillar assesses how inclusive the agency's policy design and improvement processes are. This review also evaluates how well the agency works with outside partners, since agencies often collaborate with outside stakeholders, such as community-based organizations and other governmental agencies, to achieve shared goals. The evaluation is conducted with an understanding that positive working relationships and collaboration are contingent on outside partners' willingness to work with the agencies.

| Pillar | Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review | Description of the Indicator |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Relationships and Collaboration | Stakeholder Engagement | In program creation and improving processes, how well an agency accounts for maintaining consistent and proactive engagement with vital partners such as community-based organizations, volunteer groups, and community members |
| | Institutional Engagement | How well an agency collaborates with other governmental agencies to achieve shared goals |

Workforce Development

The Workforce Development pillar focuses on the agency's staff capacity, training, and development. This review measures how well the agency maintains its headcount, trains and develops its staff, and ensures that staff are reflective of the communities being served. This pillar is evaluated with an understanding that the agency maintains and develops staff using the resources available to the agency.

| Pillar | Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review | Description of the Indicator |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Workforce Development | Staff Capacity | How well an agency accounts for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staffing levels proportionate to the community's level of need ▪ Filling and maintaining its budgeted headcount |
| | Staff Development | How well an agency accounts for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transparency and accountability of staff recruitment processes ▪ Staff training and development ▪ Staff readiness to support community needs |

Financial and Resources Management

The Financial and Resources Management pillar presents the resources and budget allocated to the agency and outlines the current citywide procurement process.

| Pillar | Indicators | Description of the Indicator |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Financial and Resources Management | Financial Management | Presentation of agency's resources and budget allocations |
| | Review of the Procurement Process | <p>There are a number of similar issues raised by agency RFPs, contracting, and late payments (for non-profit providers), but this report card will not evaluate this type of agency work. Instead, the report card will outline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Legal Landscape ▪ Key Procurement Achievements ▪ Issues and Concerns ▪ Next Steps |

Digital Government

The Digital Government pillar evaluates how advanced an agency's digital government strategies, implementation, and performance are across multiple elements. An agency's efforts are reviewed within the wider framework to ascertain whether it has the capability to achieve its intended outcomes, as well as whether the agency is effectively prioritizing its resources to meet existing mandates. This Pillar draws on aspects of digital government identified by the OECD, United Nations e-Government development models, and other frameworks.

| Pillar | Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review | Description of the Indicator |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Digital Government | Strategic Approach | Overarching strategies, policy frameworks, and goals for digital government |
| | Policy Levers | Resources and tools to enable the implementation of the strategic approach |
| | Implementation | Practices to execute the strategic approach into a concrete action |
| | Monitoring | Resources and tools to track progress or evaluate the implementation |

Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

The Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management pillar measures the agency's compliance with Open Data laws, the City Charter, and relevant local laws. This review also assesses the Mayor's Management Report targets, performance results, and any information gaps.

For the review of an agency's reporting obligations and compliance with the City's Open Data Laws,³⁸⁰ the pilot framework draws on aspects of the three main facets from the OECD's Open, Useful, and Re-usable data (OURdata) Index: data availability, data accessibility, and government support for reuse.³⁸¹

Additionally, the framework uses established best practices in performance measurement to review an agency's performance indicators listed in the MMR.

| Pillar | Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review | Description of the Indicator |
|---|---|---|
| Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management | Reporting and Data Availability | <p>Whether required reporting is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed in a timely and complete manner Presented in a manner compliant with the requirement to transmit data "in a non-proprietary format that permits automated processing" (e.g., Microsoft Excel) pursuant to New York City Charter § 1134³⁸² (and provisions of the City's Open Data Laws) Presented in a publicly accessible manner |
| | MMR Review and Evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting Targets^{383,384} (Review of targeted vs. actual performance indicators in the MMR³⁸⁵) Efficiency³⁸⁶ (Assessment of MMR performance results compared to budgeted costs) Information Gaps³⁸⁷ (Areas where the MMR does not address aspects of an agency's mission) |

Appendix B
Assessment Scale Comparison

| Assessment Framework | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|---|----------------------------------|
| Assessment Framework | Baldrige Excellence Builder | Australian Government Capability Review Framework | New Zealand Government Performance Improvement Framework | United Kingdom Government Capability Review Framework | New York City Council Adaptation |
| | Role Model | Leading | Leading | Strong | A |
| | Mature | Embedded | Embedding | Well Placed | B |
| | Early | Developing | Developing | Development Area | C |
| | | | | Urgent Development Area | D |
| | Reactive | Emerging | Weak | Serious Concerns | F |
| | | | Unable to Rate / Not Rated | | Not Rated |

Appendix C

DPR Walking Distance Analysis

Scope and Methodology

DPR’s analysis defines: “walking distance” as 1/2-mile for parks, “over 8 acres or situated on the waterfront”, and otherwise as a 1/4-mile. The Report Card map differentiates further, using 3/4-mile for flagship parks and preserves, 1/2-mile for neighborhood and community parks, 1/4-mile for recreational facilities, plazas and small parks, and 1/8-mile for parks 0.2 acres, which is smaller than approximately two basketball courts. Both analyses remove cemeteries and community gardens, as well as parkways, malls, and parking and operations properties.

| “Walking Distance” | DPR’s analysis | Council analysis |
|--------------------|---|---|
| 1/2 MILE | Parks “over 8 acres or situated on the waterfront”. | “Flagship”, Natural, “Neighborhood”, and “Community” parks, and parks greater than 3 acres. |
| 1/4 MILE | “Sites such as small playgrounds and sitting areas”. | Plazas, small parks (between 0.2 and 3 acres), and recreation areas (playgrounds, fields, courts, etc.). |
| 1/8 MILE | N/A | Parks properties smaller than 0.2 acres. |
| EXCLUDED | “Cemeteries, community gardens, or sites with no recreational equipment”. | Parks properties classed as “cemetery”, “community garden”, “greenthumb”, “community center”, “parking lot”, “retired”, “operations”, “undeveloped”, “strip, “mall”, and “parkway”. |
| ADDITIONS | “Open-space amenities not under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks”. | N/A |

Appendix D (provided by the Parks Department)

NYC Parks Maintenance & Operations (M&O)

METHODS-Sites are maintained by either Fixed Post staff or Mobile Crews.

- Fixed Post requires a physical building to which employees can report, have a place for their personal belongings, take breaks, access a bathroom, get out of the elements, and seek safety from threats. Fixed post allows for the storage of materials, supplies and equipment, which permits more efficient operations.
 - Some Fixed Post staff maintain more than one site; they report to and clean the location with the building, then walk to one or more nearby sites; this is called a 'split post'
- Mobile Crews are dispatched each day from a muster location with a vehicle, tools, equipment and supplies, route, and list of tasks; they drive from site to site completing the tasks; tracking work using Parks' Daily Task app
- In summer 2024, the approximate percent of each type is:

| | Fixed Post | Mobile Crew |
|---------|------------|-------------|
| BX | 42% | 58% |
| BK | 55% | 45% |
| MN | 30% | 70% |
| QN | 41% | 59% |
| SI | 28% | 72% |
| Average | 39% | 61% |

- During the winter the number of Fixed Post sites decrease due to limited staff and buildings which cannot be heated.
- +60% of Fixed Post and Mobile Crew staff are transitional or seasonal workers. Only 40% are full-time employees.

FREQUENCY-Sites/large park zones are assigned a Service Level Agreement (SLA).

- SLA 'A' Maintained five to seven times a week (essentially daily) – playgrounds, prominent locations, bathrooms, some athletic areas, beaches (in season), etc.
- SLA 'B' Maintained three to five times a week – lesser used areas, some athletic areas, passive lawns, planted areas, etc.
- SLA 'C' Maintained one to three times a week – natural areas, Greenstreets, etc.
- In summer 2022, the percent of each type is:

| | SLA A | SLA B | SLA C | TOTAL |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| # of Sites | 1420 | 603 | 822 | 2845 |
| % of Sites | 50% | 21% | 29% | 100% |

- Staff clean over **2,000 sites every day** (all 'A' sites, half of 'B' and 1/3 of 'C').
- Approximately **75,000 hours** are spent cleaning sites every seven days.

Task-Done by both Mobile Crew and Fixed Post staff unless otherwise noted:

- Unlock and lock sites
- Clean and restock public restrooms
- Pick up litter
- Pull bags from trash receptacles, tie them up and place at pick-up locations (bagged trash/dumped items are removed by Parks' collection trucks and/or pickup trucks in accordance with the SLA schedule or as needed)
- Remove dumped material (often homeowner and contractor waste)
- Clean drinking fountains, spray features, and drains
- Address homeless encampments; remove debris
- Remove non-bird feces
- Remove needles and other drug paraphernalia
- Address graffiti
- Look for, caution off, and report or correct hazards
- Remove leaves in season
- Respond to winter weather (snow, ice)
- Select weed removal, turf, and horticulture maintenance (mainly Fixed Post, occasionally Mobile Crews if time permits)
- Minor repairs (mainly Fixed Post, occasionally Mobile Crews if time permits)
- Paint benches (mainly Fixed Post, occasionally Mobile Crews if time permits)

BOROUGH OR SPECIALIZED CREWS

- Certain tasks are handled by borough-wide or specialized crews, including:
 - Turf maintenance
 - Ballfield grooming
 - Horticulture maintenance
 - Fence repairs
 - Sign installation and maintenance
 - Limited paving repairs

Appendix E

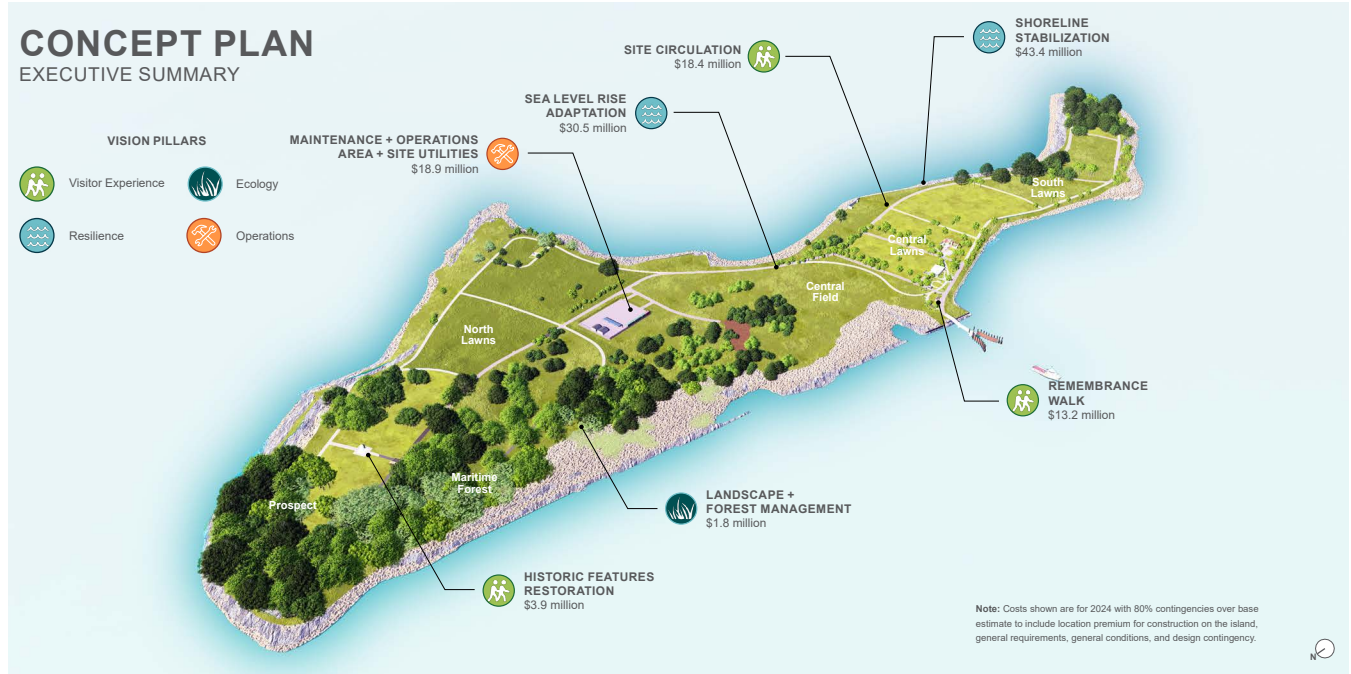
Hart Island

A little east of City Island in the Bronx, New York City's only public cemetery, Hart Island, can be found as the final resting place for over one million people.³⁸⁸ While Hart Island has a storied history, it is currently the “purportedly largest tax-funded cemetery in the world.”³⁸⁹ Upon an individual perishing in NYC with no next of kin or being unclaimed, the City will bury the body on Hart Island.³⁹⁰

Local Law 210 of 2019 transferred the control of Hart Island from the Department of Correction to the Department of Parks and Recreation—although multiple agencies still have roles in the logistics, burial, and governance of the island, including the Department of Social Services (DSS), Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, and Department of Transportation (DOT).³⁹¹ DPR was primarily given jurisdiction over the island to foster more accessible and respectful visits to the city cemetery and to create a better future for Hart Island.³⁹² DPR is currently facilitating visits to Hart Island with their Urban Park Rangers on select Tuesdays; prospective visitors can enter a lottery as slots are limited and is available free of charge.³⁹³ For people with a relationship with the deceased, they can directly request a gravesite visit and are accompanied by members of the Parks Enforcement Patrol's (PEP) Honor Guard.^{394,395}



In July 2025, DPR released the Hart Island Concept Plan where they outlined the planned future of Hart Island focusing on “visitor experience, resilience, ecology, and operations.”³⁹⁶ The proposed capital projects have a total cost of \$130.1 million—some notable projects include: shoreline infrastructure upgrades to combat sea level rise and erosion, a remembrance walk, and a welcome center with proper restroom and air conditioning facilities.³⁹⁷



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hart Island Concept Plan | 12

On August 12, 2025, DPR, in coordination with DSS and DOT, invited Council Members Krishnan and Brooks-Powers, Chairs of the Committees on Parks and Recreation, and Transportation and Infrastructure, respectively, and members of Council staff to tour Hart Island. The tour highlighted DPR’s physical improvements to the island and removal of dilapidated buildings following the transfer of jurisdiction and how DSS manages burials and disinterments. Also highlighted were elements of the public tours conducted by Urban Park Rangers that focus on the stories of those for whom Hart Island is their final resting place; the history of the island and its uses by the City, private institutions, and the United States Armed Forces; the ecology and natural wildlife of the island; and how DPR aims to be shepherds and caretakers of the island moving forward to honor the legacies of those buried on Hart Island. Officers of the PEP Honor Guard also noted how it is their solemn duty to provide a meaningful and respectful experience for those visiting a loved one’s final resting place, as well as comfort and consolation as needed.³⁹⁸



Abbreviations

AMPS – Asset Management Parks System

CBO – Community-based Organization

DOITT – Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications

DORIS – The Department of Records and Information Systems

DPR – Department of Parks and Recreation

GAO – U.S. Government Accountability Office

KPI – Key Performance Indicators

LL – Local Law

PIP – Parks Inspection Program

PMMR – Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

MOCS – Mayor's Office of Contract Services

MSA - Mayor's Office of Municipal Services Assessment

MONS – Mayor's Office of Nonprofit Services

MOPD – Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities

MMR – Mayor's Management Report

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OURdata – Open, Useful, and Reusable Data

OTI – Office of Technology and Innovation

TYCS – Ten-Year Capital Strategy

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