




# The State of NYC's Support for Parks

MARCH 2025



The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR or Parks) manages 1,700 City parks, over 1,000 playgrounds, 161 miles of waterfront and beaches, around 50 recreation centers, 65 pools, and over 2 million trees.

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. As a record number of more than **200 brush fires** spread through city parks during last year's drought, parks experts identified reductions in staff and support for parks maintenance as a key contributing factor.

Mayor Adams recently announced \$12.4 million to add second cleaning shifts for 100 new hot spots across 64 parks in his **State of the City address**. However, 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**, leading to decreased services and reduced overall satisfaction with the cleanliness of parks.



## **DPR Funding and Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget**

### **LOST FUNDING, LOST WORKFORCE**

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.

### **COUNCIL RESTORATIONS FOR FY25**

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.

### **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.



## **Findings, Decreased Service, and Why It Matters**

### **DISPROPORTIONALLY LOW CITY INVESTMENT IN PARKS**

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.

**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.

### **LESS PARKS IMPROVEMENTS**

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.

### **DECLINE IN OVERALL PARKS CONDITIONS AND CLEANLINESS**

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.

## SERVICE DISRUPTIONS AND DECLINE IN TREE MAINTENANCE

In the interest of safety, NYC Parks prioritizes dead or dying tree inspections which have the potential to fall on people, and sidewalk rating inspections in areas where contract work is planned. However, this forces other maintenance initiatives to be delayed and deprioritized and results in severe service disruptions in other areas, such as inhibiting the agency's ability to maintain lawns and remove trash. There has also been a decrease in successful tree maintenance, which speaks to the larger lack of agency capacity.

- ▶ The percentage of new tree requests that were acted upon within 180 days decreased from 78 percent in the first four months of FY24 to 46 percent in the first four months of FY25.
- ▶ Additionally, the percentage of overgrown trees and branches requests that were acted upon within 30 days decreased from 69 percent in the first four months of FY24 to 38 percent in the first four months of FY25.

## SLOW 311 RESPONSE TIMES

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.