



**New York City Council  
Oversight Hearing: Mayor's November Financial Plan  
Committee on Finance  
December 11, 2023**

**Testimony By: Emily Walker, Natural Areas Conservancy, Senior Manager of External Affairs**

My name is Emily Walker, and I am the Senior Manager of External Affairs at the Natural Areas Conservancy (NAC). Thank you to Chair Brannan and the members of the Committee on Finance for the opportunity to speak today.

We are here today as a member of the Play Fair Coalition to express our profound dismay at the budget cuts impacting NYC Parks. For an agency whose budget has consistently come in at little more than 0.6% of the entire city operating budget, the impacts of these cuts are being felt acutely by our colleagues at the agency.

In this era of climate instability, it is well documented that our parks, and in particular our natural areas, play a tremendous role in protecting and fostering a more resilient city. Research consistently shows that access to quality green spaces and parks have a multitude of benefits for residents of cities, and that well-maintained forests and wetlands have significantly more benefits than degraded forests and wetlands at cooling, carbon capture, and storm mitigation.

As a result of the November plan budget cuts, we have seen the loss of 26 permanent positions intended to unlock access to over 10,000 acres of natural areas through the formalization and management of the 300-mile network of nature trails in NYC Parks. This funding was announced by the Mayor on Earth Day as a signature initiative of the 2023 PlaNYC report, and was the result of years of advocacy. We are deeply disappointed that this funding has been cut, and are alarmed by the administration countering its own stated resiliency and sustainability goals by cutting this funding, among other similar programs such as community composting.

As a member organization of the Forest for All NYC Coalition, we are also alarmed that the current and proposed budget cuts will imperil the successful implementation of Intro. 1065, which recently became law. With a new legislative mandate to increase the canopy coverage of NYC to a target goal of 30%, we do not believe that the city will be able to meet this goal if there is not appropriate and meaningful funding for the care, conservation, and expansion of our urban forest.

Our parks and natural areas benefit the lives of every New Yorker, from longtime residents to our most recent arrivals. While we understand that moments of crisis demand hard choices from our elected officials, we also believe that these choices shouldn't come at the expense of the shared resources that make our city more resilient and livable, and that provide pathways to good, green jobs amid the worsening climate crisis. We call on our elected officials from every level of New York City's government to work together to restore the 5% budget cuts, and prevent additional cuts to services that make our city stronger. Thank you.