



**New York City Council
Zoning, Long Island City Neighborhood Plan, Queens
Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises
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My name is Emily Walker, and I am the Senior Manager of External Affairs at the Natural Areas Conservancy (NAC). Thank you to Chair Salamanca and Chair Riley, and the members of the Committee on Land Use and Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises for the opportunity to submit comments today.

The NAC is the citywide champion for NYC's natural areas, which comprise fully one third of our parks system, with over 10,000 acres of forests and wetlands in our city parks. Today we are sharing our concerns about the proposed conversion of what is known as Queensbridge Baby Park, and are restricting our comments on the OneLIC rezoning to share this information.

While there has been public discussion centered around converting this space back to full public use, we feel it is important to share more context about the crucial maintenance and operations work for our citywide network of natural areas, much of which is centered out of the facilities currently sited at Queensbridge Baby Park. For many years, NAC staff have worked closely with our colleagues in the Natural Resources Group (NRG) at the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation (NYC Parks) to coordinate forest, wetlands, and trails restoration and management operations out of Queensbridge Baby Park.

The back-end maintenance, operations, and storage based out of these facilities is critical to ensuring safe public access to our 300-mile network of nature trails in city parks, as well as providing our team and the NRG team with the necessary space to store tools, fleet vehicles, and lumber at the site. In the absence of other appropriate locations for these uses, we ask that the City Council and the Administration take careful consideration of the future of this site. In the public call to eliminate these current uses of Queensbridge Baby Park, we have been frustrated by the lack of acknowledgement that NYC Parks and its partners' have critical operational needs in this space. Additionally, there have been no solutions or proposals offered for relocating these facilities.

The relatively central location of Queensbridge Baby Park has fostered collaboration and teamwork for the Citywide Trails Team, and many of the staff of forest restoration, management, and stewardship practitioners at NYC Parks. Given that many natural areas are located in the Bronx and Eastern Queens, the ability to base operations in this location has been crucial to ensure that work can take place in a timely and efficient manner. Vehicles are generally required for NRG staff and members of the Citywide Trails Team to bring necessary tools, lumber, and supplies to work sites across the five boroughs.

We also would like to acknowledge that the Natural Resources Group is one of the divisions of NYC Parks that has received inconsistent support and funding to carry out its work, despite having a mandate to care for a large proportion of our public space portfolio. In the FY25 budget,



NAC was disheartened by the elimination of 51 critical forest management positions from the Adopted Budget. The loss of these positions came after the elimination in November 2023 of \$2.4 million intended to create 26 full-time, baselined positions to support the care of our 300-mile network of nature trails. It is not an overstatement to say that our colleagues in the Natural Resources Group have borne the brunt of many poor budgetary decisions to support their important work, and they are now made to feel as though the space they use to manage their operations is an imposition to New Yorkers.

We strongly urge the City Council to consider a meaningful solution to ensuring that our Parks workers, who do so much to care for our vital and critical natural areas, are provided with ample space to house their operations. Maintenance and operational space is necessary to ensure that our parks and natural areas are kept to a high level of care, and we ask that this not get overlooked in the conversation about the future of Queensbridge Baby Park.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments on this rezoning proposal.

