

MAS Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation regarding Parks Department properties currently inaccessible to the public

December 1, 2016

The Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS) supports opening and improving public access to city-owned properties. As residents and taxpayers of New York City, we depend on the effective management, protection, and enhancement of what is collectively ours—parks, open space, monuments, streetscapes, infrastructure, views, and other intangible resources.

This week MAS released a first-of-its-kind interactive tool to map the more than 14,000 city-owned and leased properties, amounting to a land area the size of Brooklyn. This online tool uses two datasets provided by New York City: MapPLUTO and City Owned and Leased Properties (COLP). MAS encourages the members of this committee and the public at large to examine these holdings with our new tool and identify opportunities for improving, protecting, and utilizing city-owned property. (Visit www.mas.org/colp.)

MAS commends the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) for successfully managing a vast inventory of holdings. According to the COLP dataset, the Department of Citywide Administrative Services oversees 1,679 properties “with no current use,” the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) has 1,050, and DPR has just one! However, opportunities for improvement remain substantial.

According to the use codes provided by the COLP dataset, there are 90 city-owned park properties characterized as “undeveloped open space,” accounting for approximately 191 acres of land (see attachment). Seventy-four of these sites are located within the boundaries of the Community Parks Initiative, a program led by DPR aimed at redeveloping parks in underserved communities. This presents an opportunity to maximize each of these holdings for the communities that need them most.

Meanwhile, thirty-two properties classified as undeveloped open space are located along Southern Boulevard and Jerome Avenue in the Bronx. Both of these areas are undergoing neighborhood planning studies under the Department of City Planning (DCP) PLACES initiative. Another thirty-one properties labeled as undeveloped open space are in the Edgemere Urban Renewal Area in the Rockaways. Similarly, Edgemere is undergoing a planning initiative for redevelopment, an effort lead by HPD. MAS urges the city to closely examine underutilized city-owned park properties within the boundaries of these planning initiatives and explore possibilities for developing recreational facilities, cultural amenities, coastal protection, and other appropriate uses.

MAS is also concerned about incompatible or competing uses within park space. Specifically, storage facilities (both indoor and outdoor), extensive parking lots, and maintenance facilities often hamper user experience and limit accessibility. Improved interagency coordination among DPR, the Department of Sanitation (DOS), Department of

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Environmental Protection, and other city agencies can help mitigate the undesirable repercussions of sharing these uses within designated parkland.

All New Yorkers deserve a chance to experience and explore our city. MAS encourages the city to examine park properties on a case-by-case basis considering environmental concerns, landmark designations, economic feasibility, and other factors in order to determine “the highest and best use” of our shared open space.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.