

Small Parks Targeted for Development by City of New York

Advocates Demand City Council Action to Protect 250+ small parks under threat

(September 13, 2018 | New York, NY) On Monday, September 17, a broad coalition of advocacy organizations including New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P), the Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS), and the Trust for Public Land (TPL) will testify at a City Council Parks Committee hearing on the urgent need to create protections for a little-known network of public parks known as “jointly operated playgrounds” (JOPs). There are 268 JOPs in the city, spread across all five boroughs and 49 of 51 City Council districts.

The hearing comes in the midst of a legal battle over the future of one JOP in particular, Marx Brothers Playground in East Harlem. Presented as a simple park relocation project by the City, the proposal seeks to transform Marx Brothers Playground into a development site on behalf of a developer seeking to build a 760-foot residential tower. The case sets a dangerous precedent for all of New York City’s precious parkland, JOPs in particular. Oral arguments in the lawsuit, filed jointly by MAS, Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, Carnegie Hill Neighbors, and CIVITAS, are expected to begin later this year.

Thirty-seven percent of NYC Parks playgrounds are JOPs, meaning that over one third of all playgrounds in the City are at risk of development. In some City Council districts, JOPs make up a significant majority of all NYC Parks playgrounds. For example, in District 23, covering eastern Queens, 82 percent of NYC Parks playgrounds are JOPs, and each borough has at least one district where JOPs account for over 60 percent of NYC Parks playgrounds. Many JOPs have seen significant investment from the City: 26 have received over \$94 million collectively in investment through the City’s Community Parks Initiative over the past four years, with another \$9-18 million in the pipeline.

The public hearing of the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation will be held on **Monday, September 17th, at 1:00 PM at 250 Broadway, 14th Floor Committee Room**. Members of the media and concerned New Yorkers are encouraged to attend.

“Our city needs affordable housing and education infrastructure, but it also needs open space. Having to choose amongst these critical needs is a false choice,” said **Lynn Kelly, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks**. “Children and families would be hardest-hit by the loss of these playgrounds, and in a city that strives for equity we need to guarantee that all residents have space to play, exercise, and spend time in their community. That’s why we are asking the City Council to ensure that these JOPs are provided the same level of protection as any other park.”

“In the Marx Brothers Playground case, the City is seeking to apply development rights to a park for the first time, a move that would have far-reaching implications across the city,” said **Elizabeth Goldstein, President of MAS**, a plaintiff in the lawsuit. “The precedent set here could unleash 20 million square feet of buildable area, approximately the size of ten Empire State Buildings, and endanger hundreds of small parks that are vital to keeping our neighborhoods livable. The City Council must reaffirm the long-standing status of these parks in the face of this latest threat.”

“Access to close-to-home parks is critical for public health and vibrant communities,” said **Carter Strickland, New York State Director for The Trust for Public Land**. “New York City does well on

our ParkScore ratings because 97 percent of its residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, but without JOPs, over 220,000 residents wouldn't have access."

About New Yorkers for Parks

For over 100 years New Yorkers for Parks has been the independent champion for quality parks and open space for all New Yorkers. Through our research, advocacy, and the Daffodil Project, we work with communities and elected officials to promote and preserve quality open space across the city. Learn more: www.ny4p.org

About the Municipal Art Society of New York

For 125 years, the Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS) has worked to educate and inspire New Yorkers to engage in the betterment of our city. As a non-profit advocacy organization, MAS mobilizes diverse allies to focus on issues that affect our city from sidewalk to skyline. Through three core campaign areas, MAS protects New York's legacy spaces, encourages thoughtful planning and urban design, and fosters inclusive neighborhoods across the five boroughs. For more information, visit www.mas.org

About the Trust for Public Land

The Trust for Public Land creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. Millions of people live within a ten-minute walk of a Trust for Public Land garden, park or natural area, and millions more visit these sites every year. Visit The Trust for Public Land at www.tpl.org

###