

MAS Testimony on the FY24 Budget for the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation (NYC Parks)

March 22, 2023

The Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS) supports the Play Fair Coalition's demand to increase funding to allocate 1% of the City budget, \$1 billion per year, to the Department of Parks & Recreation (NYC Parks). MAS has a long history of advocating for a more livable public realm, including a well-maintained and equitable system of parks and open spaces.

Generations of New Yorkers and visitors rely on parks for their wellbeing. Open space and greenery are essential for recreation and gatherings, respite, and peace. Our parks and recreation centers are among New York City's greatest assets. Our street trees are essential to mitigating the urban heat island effect and improving public health. And yet, NYC Parks has remained underfunded for decades, contributing to vast inequities across New York City. As a result, critical needs including maintenance are unmet, especially in underserved communities. A lack of maintenance can lead to damage that requires capital expenditure to repair, creating a spiral of demand for greater capital funding.

Both Mayor Adams and City Council Speaker Adams have expressed support for allocating 1% of the City budget to NYC Parks. Funding at 1% of the City budget will ensure that parks are maintained, provide safety and cleanliness, expand the tree canopy to improve public health and the environmental health, and increase community programs across the city.

This year, MAS supports Play Fair's intermediary goals of increasing Parks staff headcount, baselining 1,065 agency positions, adding \$5.59 million in funding for the Parks Equity Initiative and \$3.5 million for natural areas, forests, wetlands, and trails. This funding will leverage the investment of thousands of volunteers, stewards, and private commitment to our parks system.

If we continue to underfund our parks, we are hampering a vision for a broader connectivity and use of all our publicly owned assets; our beloved plazas and squares, gardens, nature trails, streets, and the needed expansion of the parks system itself. These are imperative to working towards an equitable open space system in New York.

For millions of New Yorkers who live in dense urban settings, parks are their backyards and streetscapes are their living rooms. The City budget must allocate 1% to NYC Parks to restore, maintain, and expand these vital public resources for all New Yorkers.