



Vital Parks for All



Investing in NYC's Living Infrastructure

A Letter From Mayor Adams and Commissioner Donoghue

Dear New Yorkers,

New York City's parks are vital. They are essential to our city's soul, keeping us healthy, safe, and connected to nature and to one another.

Parks make neighborhoods livable, with places to reflect, relax, and gather with family and friends. They enhance the social fabric of neighborhoods, bringing people together from all walks of life at the basketball court, pool, playground, movie night or festival. They build community and belonging through human connection and care. Waterfront parks, greenways, and public plazas connect to and enhance business districts, attracting economic investment and new jobs.

New York's parks system is alive, with street trees, green spaces, forests, rivers, lakes, and wetlands. This living infrastructure helps mitigate the extreme heat, compromised air quality, and growing storm damage of climate change, while improving the city's environmental health. Our parks are natural classrooms that empower us to learn and grow through stewardship events, nature tours, workshops, internships, and green jobs training.

As we face mental and physical health crises and intensifying effects of climate change, parks are more critical than ever to the city's viability. We must protect and enhance them to safeguard our city's future. Vital Parks for All is our plan to restore aging park facilities, deliver new park resources where they are needed most, and empower New Yorkers with the data they need to advocate for their parks. Above all, Vital Parks for All is a \$3.2 billion investment in our city's living infrastructure.

We look forward to collaborating with you to deliver Vital Parks for All to equitably strengthen New York's health, communities, and environment.



Eric Adams

Mayor
City of New York



Sue Donoghue

Commissioner
NYC Parks

A Letter From Deputy Mayor Joshi

Dear New Yorkers,

As your Deputy Mayor for Operations, I know firsthand that NYC's parks are living infrastructure, a key component of the fundamental systems that support our city's functioning for the well-being of New Yorkers.

Our parks and public spaces are alive—with nature and with people. They offer facilities for working out, swimming, learning a skill, having a meal, renting a bicycle, and other life-giving activities. Vibrant public spaces serve as the connective tissue of healthy communities, making our city competitive, livable, and resilient. And unlike other types of infrastructure, an investment in our city's living infrastructure often appreciates in value over time as healthy, mature trees, green spaces, and thriving communities make our city stronger and more resilient.

We know our parks system needs to serve many people and many purposes at the same time. With over 2,000 properties and 30,000 acres, parks can contribute to the City's response to climate change. Reconstructed playgrounds like Asser Levy offer new play equipment but also a flood gate structure to help protect portions of the Lower East Side from coastal storms. We are increasing tree canopy, prioritizing heat-vulnerable communities, and restoring our natural areas in the neighborhoods that are most exposed to the effects of extreme heat and climate change.

New Yorkers who help celebrate, steward, and advocate for our parks also play a role in this living infrastructure. That's why we are excited to share data to help everyday New Yorkers recognize a park's Vital Signs and its role in a Vital Parks System. With better data, New Yorkers can become better advocates for their parks.

Together, we will expand the living infrastructure that helps strengthen the health and safety of our city and its residents.



Meera Joshi

Deputy Mayor
City of New York

Parks were a lifeline to New Yorkers during COVID, and continue to be heavily used.



Why Now?

Parks have always been important to New Yorkers, but now, protecting our living infrastructure adequately has become essential.

New York City faces growing challenges that make immediate investment in our parks system imperative, including:

- **Increased reliance on parks.** Since COVID, we've experienced rising trends in park use, with New Yorkers visiting their parks 527 million times in 2022 alone.¹
- **The crisis of loneliness in the wake of the pandemic.** In May 2023, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy issued an advisory on the epidemic of loneliness and its extensive health impacts, including a reduction in life expectancy. Dr. Murthy recommended both volunteering and spending time in nature as important antidotes to loneliness.
- **Climate change and extreme heat.** Heat waves, hurricanes, and flash floods are occurring more frequently and becoming more dangerous. Park resources such as pools, beaches, and trees all make our city cooler. Our parks are also critical in the City's efforts to build resiliency, mitigate stormwater, protect the city from rising seas, and more.
- **Declining life expectancy.** Rates of chronic diseases are increasing, disproportionately affecting Black and Brown New Yorkers. New York City has particularly suffered from increased childhood obesity rates as well as a youth mental health crisis in the wake of the pandemic. Our recreational facilities, pools, and dynamic public programs help New Yorkers get and stay fit, improving their health.
- **Aging infrastructure.** Many park facilities were constructed in the 1950s or earlier, and need new capital investment to extend their useful lifespan to provide critical services.

“Evidence shows that increased connection can help reduce the risk of serious health conditions such as heart disease, stroke, dementia, and depression. Communities where residents are more connected with one another fare better on several measures of population health, community safety, community resilience when natural disasters strike, prosperity, and civic engagement.”

– “Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation”
The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community, May 2023.

¹ Economic Benefit of Parks in New York City, Trust for Public Land, 2022.

Our Plan

Vital Parks: An Investment in New York City's Living Infrastructure is our \$3.2 billion plan to equitably strengthen our city's health, environment, and communities through our parks system.

Our plan presents a vision for the parks system of today and for the future, to equitably deliver new park resources to underserved communities, and equip New Yorkers with information to enjoy, celebrate, and support their parks.

All New Yorkers deserve to live in thriving neighborhoods with numerous park amenities and their indispensable benefits. Parks, with their abundant green spaces, trees, play and fitness facilities, enrichment programs, gathering spaces, resiliency elements, and opportunities for civic engagement, are vital to the livability of NYC's communities. We therefore are funding key improvements to protect and expand the extensive benefits of our living infrastructure in our city.

Just as we invest in better roads and sewers, we need to invest in our parks now to help safeguard our city's present and future.

Vital Parks: An Investment in New York City's Living Infrastructure is our data-based plan to protect existing park facilities, equitably deliver new park resources to underserved communities, and equip New Yorkers with information to celebrate and support their parks at this crucial time.



30,000
acres

of parkland across
five boroughs



14 miles

of beaches
and 65 pools



5.7 million

trees under our
care in parks and
along the streets
of NYC



13,000

fitness, sports,
education, and
cultural programs



Rockaway Beach boardwalk and shade structure, reconstructed at a higher elevation for storm resilience.



Kids keeping cool at Sunset Park Spray Feature.

A Vital Parks System

How do we define success in providing a community with a Vital Parks System?

First we developed a list of measurable elements that contribute to a Vital Parks System. These elements should be easily accessible to New Yorkers, either within a short walk for neighborhood amenities such as playgrounds, restrooms, and shade, or a quick transit ride for regional facilities such as a pool or natural area.

Communities need access to parks that are:



Clean and Safe

Clean and safe parks and facilities are well-maintained and free from litter. They support high levels of public use, improving safety and deterring crime. They offer amenities, and discourage negative activity. They keep New Yorkers safe from heat in the summer and are conducive to improving fitness and public health all year long.



Green and Resilient

Green and resilient parks provide access to a variety of green spaces. These include waterfronts, wetlands, trails, community gardens, and greenways for biking and walking. Parks also offer abundant trees along streets, in active areas of parks, and within natural areas to better immerse New Yorkers in nature for stress relief as well as health and environmental benefits. These green spaces also help to combat extreme heat, capture carbon, and filter stormwater, and are designed to be resilient to rising seas and increasingly severe storms.



Supported by Engaged and Empowered New Yorkers

Parks are cared for by dedicated staff who welcome all. In addition, parks that are supported by engaged and empowered New Yorkers offer enriching park programming, making the park active and vibrant. They must also have ample volunteer opportunities and embrace partner groups to help steward and advocate for their park's present and its future.



Clean and Safe Elements

- Sports courts, athletic fields, or skate parks
- Drinking fountains or spray features
- New or renovated amenities
- Parks Enforcement Patrol coverage
- Park Condition Score \geq 95
- Playgrounds
- Pools or beaches
- Public restrooms
- Recreation centers



Green and Resilient Elements

- Community gardens
- Forever Wild natural areas
- Greenways
- Tree canopy cover
- Street trees
- Trails
- Waterfronts



Engaged and Empowered Elements

- Park partner groups
- Nature centers
- Public programs or special events
- Volunteer and stewardship events
- Dog runs

Our Strategic Initiatives

What is our plan for delivering a Vital Parks System today?

Through an initial investment of more than \$3.2 billion, we are already making progress in providing Vital Parks for All. Informed by data and map analysis, these strategic initiatives will strengthen and enhance our system, focusing on the communities most in need.

Our data will be used to guide future investments in parks, continuing our focus on underserved neighborhoods. These investments will enhance physical space, and will bring them to life with people, programs, and nature, improving individual, community, and environmental health for all.

Volunteers plant Smooth Cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) at Sunset Cove in Queens.



✓ Clean and Safe
🌱 Green and Resilient
💙 Engaged and Empowered

1. Stronger Parks, Safer Communities ✓ 💙

Investing \$203 million in playground and facility upgrades in precincts identified by the Mayoral Gun Violence Prevention Task Force. This includes a new \$90 million recreation center in the Bronx and builds upon our initial investment of \$53 million in park improvements in communities from Morrisania, Bronx, to Brownsville, Brooklyn. These park upgrades and new amenities will be complemented by over 1,000 outdoor public programs to activate parks and build community, improving safety.

6. Growing Wetlands, Gaining Resilience ✓ 🌱 💙

A \$100 million investment in partnership with the Natural Areas Conservancy to advance 19 wetland restoration projects in the neighborhoods that need them most.

7. Expanding Tree Canopy 🌱

A \$136 million investment to plant street trees in the most heat-vulnerable communities in NYC.

2. Let's Swim NYC ✓

A close to \$1 billion capital investment to protect aging pool infrastructure across the five boroughs and build two new pools in Jamaica, Queens and East Flatbush, Brooklyn, expanding swim equity and protecting New Yorkers from extreme heat.

8. Citywide Parks Network ✓ 💙

An initiative with the City Parks Foundation to create a network spanning grass roots organizations to larger conservancies, building capacity and growing new partners in underserved communities, to ensure all parks are supported by engaged New Yorkers. This work will be supported by the NYC Green Fund, which will grow to \$30 million by 2028.

3. Better Bathrooms ✓ 💙

An over \$150 million investment to protect aging bathroom facilities, and creatively and efficiently expand bathroom access to ensure our parks can support extended use for play, fitness, work, and community gatherings, improving community safety. We'll reconstruct 36 restrooms and add 46 new bathrooms over the next five years.

9. Let's Green NYC ✓ 🌱 💙

An initiative to empower 500,000-plus New Yorkers with opportunities to steward and improve their parks, connecting them to nature and one another, improving their physical and mental health, and keeping parks clean and safe.

4. Growing Greenways ✓ 🌱

An investment of more than \$1 billion by Parks and City agency partners to meet the growing demand for biking and walking connections that link parks to one another and to business districts, improving livability, health, and the environment in disadvantaged communities across the five boroughs.

10. Let's Play NYC ✓ 💙

A \$471 million investment to protect and restore existing recreation centers as safe havens and a half billion dollar investment to build five new recreation centers in communities of need. We'll also continue to offer Saturday Night Lights programs for youth at 14 centers and more than 13,000 outdoor public programs to build skills, curiosity, engagement, and well-being.

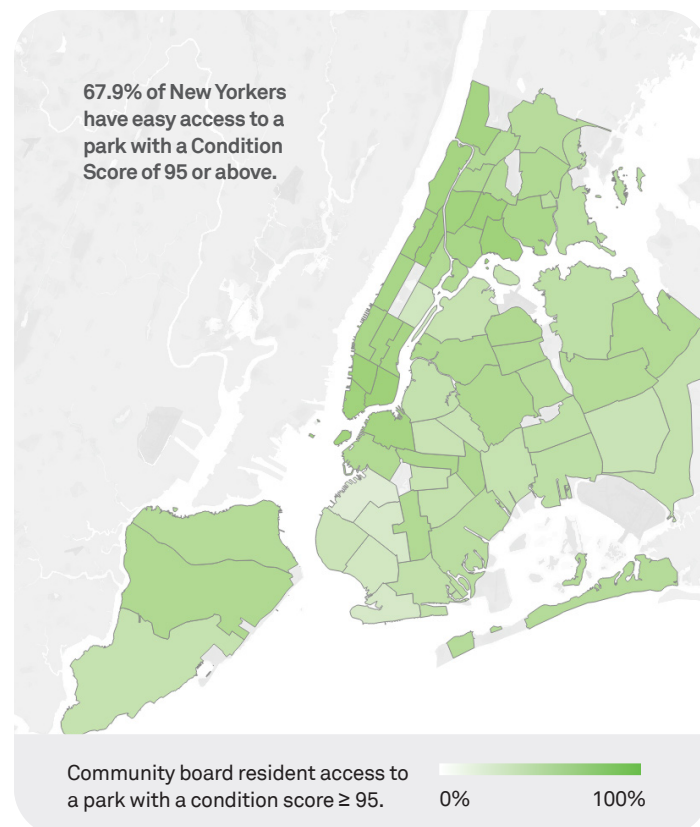
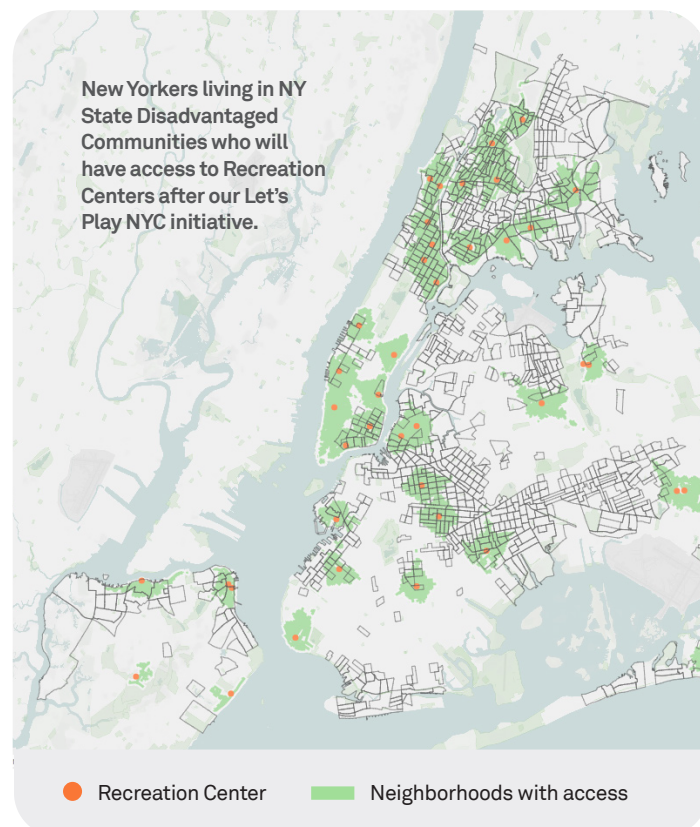
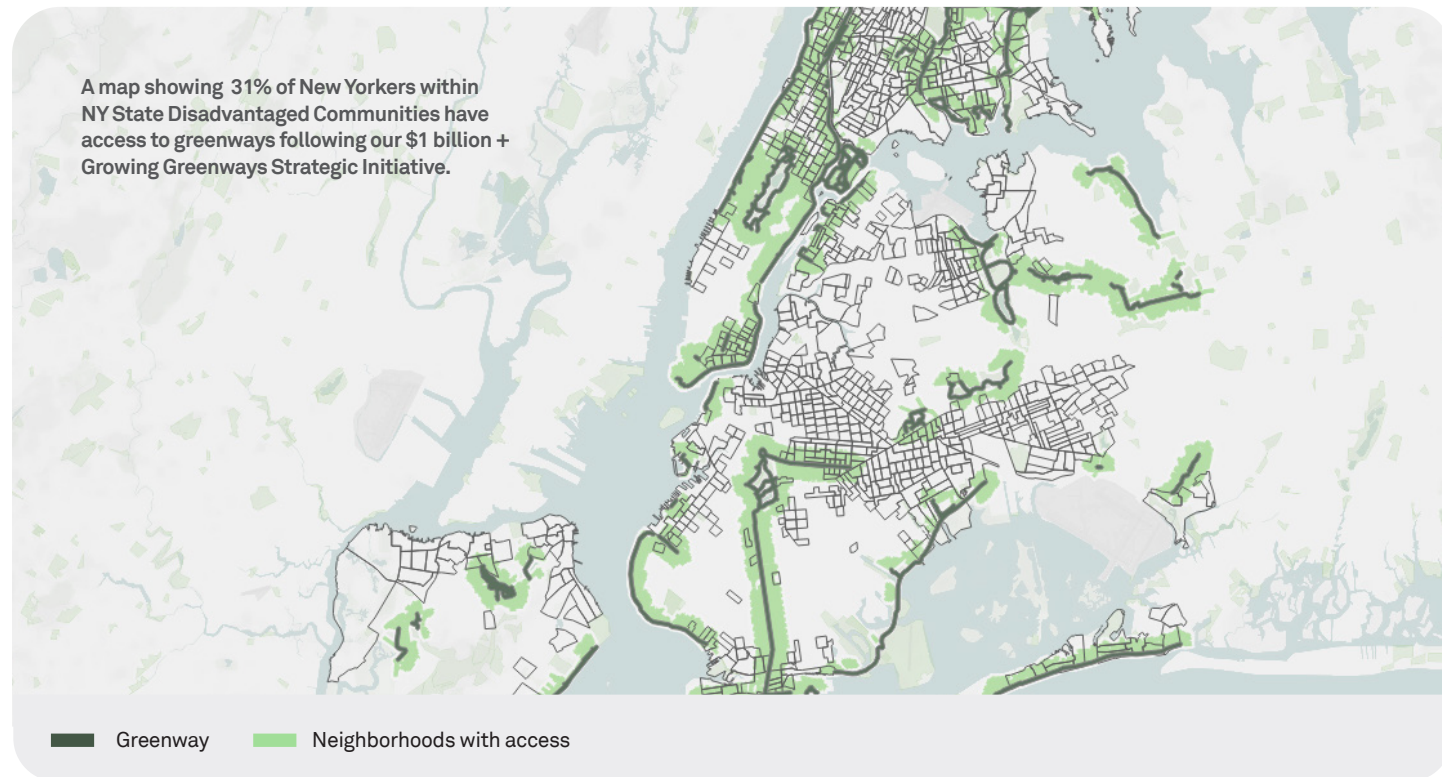
5. Growing Greenspaces 🌱

An \$80 million investment to acquire properties in underserved neighborhoods to improve livability and ecological resilience.

Our Tools

Parks conducted a detailed analysis of community access to these Vital Parks elements to help inform our strategic initiatives. Now we want to give you access to the same tools.

Visit nyc.gov/vitalparks to try the interactive maps, which show where New Yorkers are well served by their parks system, and where we need to focus our efforts and resources to improve future access for all New Yorkers.



Vital Parks Elements	Percentage of New Yorkers With Easy Access
Within a 10-minute walk	
Active recreation: sports courts, fields, or skate parks	79.4%
Community gardens	40.3%
Dog runs	18.4%
Cooling drinking fountains or spray features	85.1%
Engaged park partner groups	76.8%
New or renovated parks	70.2%
Parks Enforcement Patrol coverage	47.8%
Park Condition Score ≥ 95*	67.9%
Playgrounds	79.2%
Public programs or special events	59.7%
Public restrooms	69.8%
Volunteer and stewardship events	77.5%
Within a 15-minute transit ride	
Forever Wild natural areas	31.4%
Greenways	29.2%
Nature centers	5.7%
Pools or beaches for swimming	29.5%
Recreation centers	23.8%
Waterfronts	30%
Trails	25.3%
Across the city	
Streets fully planted with trees	45%
Tree canopy cover	22%**



“.. Having grown up here, I really see the value... of having a space in the community where people can come and unite...every time I come into one of these recreation centers for Shape Up New York, I’ve noticed how people are connecting, and just being with one another...I think [it] is huge to have these kind of facilities.”

– Shape Up Participant
Thomas Jefferson Recreation Center, 2023

* Our new Park Condition Score is a comprehensive score measuring cleanliness metrics, which include litter, structural elements such as play equipment, landscape elements, and the state of amenities within restrooms.

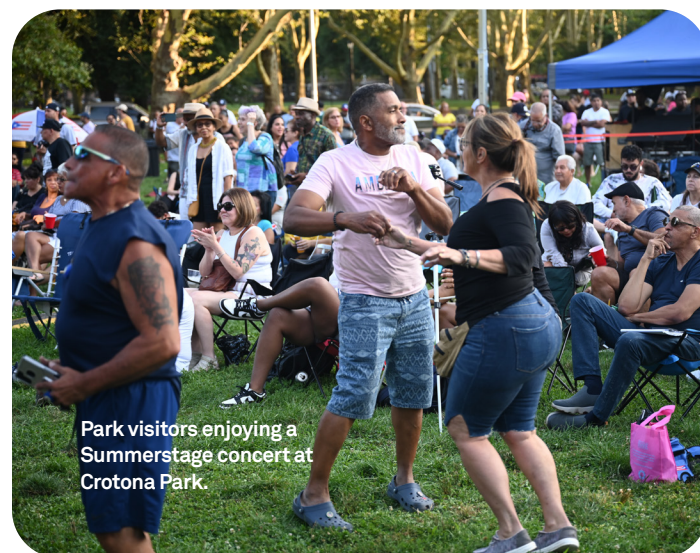
** 22% of the City’s land area, rather than population, has full canopy cover. The citywide goal for tree canopy cover is 30%.

Be Part of Vital Parks for All

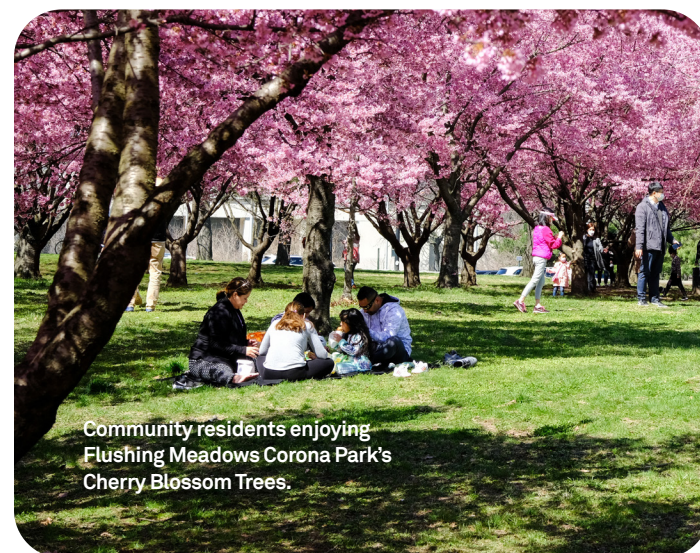
- Visit the [Parks website](#). Learn about your park's Vital Signs. Find out how each park measures up to our vision of a clean and safe, green and resilient, and engaged and empowered parks system.
- Explore the [online interactive Vital Parks map](#). This tool shows which Vital Parks Elements you have access to in your community or any place you visit in New York City.
- [Get engaged](#). Visit [nyc.gov/parks](#) to find hundreds of opportunities to participate in programs, volunteer, watch a movie, join a recreation center, or find shade on a hot summer day.
- [Spread the Vital Parks love](#). Share your story of how Parks improved your health, helped you grow, or strengthened your community. Post about your favorite park experience on your preferred social media platform. Visit a new park. Thank a Parks worker.

“ People who live in areas with more trees experience better mental health and have lower crime rates and higher property values, whereas the areas with the fewest trees have the highest rates of respiratory illness. Protecting trees isn't altruism. It's a form of self-care.”

— “I Tackled My Climate Anxiety by Becoming a Parks Department Super Steward One weed at a time.”
Stephanie Foo, Curbed, August 2021.



Park visitors enjoying a Summerstage concert at Crotona Park.



Community residents enjoying Flushing Meadows Corona Park's Cherry Blossom Trees.



Volunteers planting trees during a Let's Green NYC event.

Vital Parks



NYC Parks

NYC

Eric Adams
Mayor

Vital Parks for All: Investing in NYC's Living Infrastructure

For more information, visit nyc.gov/vitalparks