

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Jointly with

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND
HUMAN RIGHTS

And

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND
RECREATION

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May 27, 2026
Start: 10:11 a.m.
Recess: 2:19 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Linda Lee Chairperson

Ty Hankerson, Chairperson
Parks & Recreation

Sandy Nurse, Chairperson
Civil & Human Rights

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Shaun Abreu
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Shekar Krishnan
Linda Lee
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Pierina Ana Sanchez
Kayla Santosuosso
Sanda Ung

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Christine Clarke
Commissioner of Commission on Human Rights

Jose Rios Lua
Chief of Staff at Commission on Human Rights

Tricia Shimamura
Commissioner of Department of Parks and
Recreation

David Stark
Executive Financial Officer at Department of
Parks and Recreation

Benjamin Osborne
Assistant Commissioner for Forestry at Department
of Parks and Recreation

David Cerron
Assistant Commissioner at Department of Parks and
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Margaret Nelson
Deputy Commissioner for Public Programs and
Community Engagement at Department of Parks and
Recreation

Mark Focht
First Deputy Commissioner at Department of Parks
and Recreation

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3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning. Good
4 morning. Welcome to the New York City Council
5 Executive Budget Hearing on the Committee on Finance,
6 joint with the Committee on Civil and Human Rights
7 and the Committee on Parks and Recreation. At this
8 time, please silence all electronics and do not
9 approach the dais. Any questions or concerns, please
10 reach a Sergeant-at-Arms. Thank you for your
11 cooperation. Chairs, you may begin.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Good morning,
13 everyone, and welcome to day two of the fiscal '27
14 Executive Budget hearings. I'm Council Member Linda
15 Lee, and today's hearings will begin with New York
16 City Commission on Human Rights, followed by
17 Department of Parks and Recreation. I'm pleased to be
18 joined by my colleague, Council Member Sandy Nurse,
19 Chair of the Committee on Civil and Human Rights. And
20 we've been joined today by our colleagues, Deputy
21 Speaker Williams, Council Member Marte, Council
Member Wong, Council Member Hudson, and Council
Member J. Sanchez. And am I missing anyone? No, I
think that's it. So welcome, Commissioner, Christine
Clarke and your team, and thank you all for joining

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3 us today to answer our questions. On May 12th, 2026,
4 the administration rel- 2027, right? The admin- oh
5 no, '26, sorry. I'm so confused with what year- I'm
6 sorry, it's only day two. Okay. The administration
7 released the Executive Financial Plan for fiscal 2026
8 to 2030 with a proposed fiscal '27 budget of \$124.7
9 billion. The New York City Commission on Human Rights
10 proposed fiscal '27 budget of \$13.4 million
11 represents 0.01 percent of the administration's
12 proposed fiscal '27 budget in the Executive Plan.
13 This is a decrease of \$900,000 or six percent from
14 the \$14.3 million originally budgeted in the FY27
15 Preliminary Plan. This decrease is a result of the
16 administration's vacancy reductions, which decreased
17 CCHR's budgeted headcount by nine, as well as
18 unrestored OTPS funding. As of April 2026, CCHR's
19 actual headcount was 29 less than their fiscal '26
20 budgeted headcount. In the Council's Preliminary
21 Budget response, we called on the Mayor to restore
and baseline \$410,000 for general operating support.
This funding is essential to ensure that the
Commission can adequately reach New Yorkers to inform
them of their rights, responsibilities, and reporting

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3 options available to them. We were disappointed to
4 see that our request was not included in the plan. At
5 a time when many New Yorkers feel uncertain about the
6 state of their civil rights protections, it is more
7 important than ever that CCHR is meaningfully
8 supported. A reduction in the commission's headcount
9 raises concerns. New Yorkers would benefit greatly
10 from quicker case processing, and maintaining and
11 growing staff capacity is key to making that
12 possible. We look forward to hearing from the
13 Commission today about the impact of these budget
14 reductions on its operations, and how we can work
15 together to better support the Commission's important
16 work. And I would now like to turn over to my
17 Co-chair for this hearing, Council Member Nurse, for
18 her opening statement.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Good morning, and
20 thank you, Chair Lee. My name is Sandy Nurse, and I'm
21 the Chair of this committee. CCHR enforces the New
York City Human Rights Law by bringing forward cases
of discrimination as well as educating New Yorkers
about their rights and obligations. This executive
plan includes detrimental cuts to the Commission's

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3 budget. And while the administration is instituting
4 budget cuts across agencies, the Commission faces one
5 of the highest, 10.8 percent in fiscal '26 and six
6 percent in fiscal '27. As Chair Lee said, CCHR's
7 headcount is down, which is extremely worrying given
8 the Commission's charter-mandated responsibilities.
9 The Commission also faces a high vacancy rate of 22
10 percent, and at a time when there are no federal
11 avenues for New Yorkers fighting human rights
12 violations, it is essential that the administration
13 restores and expands CCHR's headcount. I'm eager to
14 hear how the admin believes we can carry out all the
15 work required here with less resources. Additionally,
16 as Chair Lee highlighted, the Executive Budget did
17 not include the restoration of \$410,000 in fiscal 27
18 million for general operating support, which is
19 extremely small amount given the size of the entire
20 budget of this city. This funding is essential for
21 the Commission's outreach and ability to educate New
Yorkers on their rights and responsibilities, and I'm
frankly a little concerned and disappointed that the
Mayor will not uphold his campaign promise to expand
the Commission's budget. In addition to these issues,

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3 we will discuss the Commission's Preliminary Racial
4 Equity Plan, which was published as part of the
5 citywide Preliminary Racial Equity Plan in April. The
6 Racial Equity Plan is meant to inform the city's
7 budget, and I think we can all agree that there is a
8 lot of concern to see many of CCHR's budget changes
9 go against these established goals. So I would like
10 to thank the finance staff, committee staff, of
11 course the Chair, and my own staff in preparation for
12 this hearing. I'm looking forward to the
13 conversation. Thank you, Chair.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Before we get
15 started, I'd like to take a quick moment to thank the
16 entire Council Finance Division staff for their
17 efforts praying for these hearings, especially Allie
18 Stofer [sp?], Florentine Kabore [sp?], and Kaitlyn
19 O'Hagan [sp?] from Council Finance for preparing
20 today's hearing, Committee Counsel Brian Sarfo
21 [sp?], my Senior Advisor Athena Tse [sp?], and all
the finance analysts and support staff who make it
all work. And as a reminder, for this year's budget
joint hearings, we will take public testimony on all
agencies' Executive Budget on Wednesday, June 10th,

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3 beginning at 9:30 a.m. So I will now turn it over to
4 Committee Counsel to swear in the witnesses for their
5 testimony.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning. Do you
7 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
8 nothing but the truth before this committee and to
9 respond honestly to council member questions?
10 Commissioner Clarke?

11 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I do.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And— oh, Chief of
13 Staff Rios Lua?

14 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: I do.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin.

16 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Hello, good morning,
17 and thank you all. My name is Christine Clarke. The
18 Chair and Commissioner of the New York City
19 Commission on Human Rights. Thank you to the Chairs
20 and the committees for holding this hearing on our
21 annual budget. Since joining the Commission on Human
Rights as part of the Mamdani administration, I've
worked hard, supported by my talented and hardworking
team, including the person I forgot to introduce, our
Chief of Staff and Deputy Commissioner for External

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3 Affairs, Jose Rios Lua. Supported by the talented and
4 hardworking team, I was lucky enough to to inherit,
5 I've worked hard to show up for New Yorkers every
6 single day and to make real the hopes and dreams of
7 the civil rights movements, ensuring that all the
8 rights and privileges that come with being a resident
9 of this great city are shared equally among all.

10 While the Department of Transportation fills
11 potholes, we make sure that New Yorkers who use
12 wheelchairs and service dogs are able to utilize the
13 buses that drive over those now patched potholes.

14 While HRA provides housing vouchers for people, we
15 work to ensure that landlords do not turn those
16 people away so that the promise of those vouchers are
17 fully realized into stable, affordable tenancies.

18 While HPD fights to create affordable housing in this
19 city, we fight to make sure that people can keep the
20 jobs they need to pay for that housing and that
21 families can actually access that housing regardless
of their race, religion, national origin, disability,
pregnancy, and more. Under the leadership of Mayor
Mamdani, we are working hand-in-hand with other
agencies and community partners to make this city

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3 more affordable, more equitable, and more livable for
4 all New Yorkers. Since I began earlier this year, the
5 Commission on Human Rights has obtained over \$1
6 million in restitution for victims of discrimination,
7 almost all of whom are struggling to make ends meet
8 in the city and to put food on the table every night.
9 We've also obtained over \$200,000 in civil penalties
10 just since January. We've obtained almost \$350,000 in
11 damages for victims of disability discrimination in
12 housing while ensuring that their landlords actually
13 build the accessible ramps and rails that they need
14 to keep— to stay in their homes. We've obtained over
15 \$600,000 in damages for victims of employment
16 discrimination, from race discrimination to pregnancy
17 discrimination to sexual harassment and more. We've
18 also reached a settlement with the MTA that applies
19 to every single public bus in the city to ensure that
20 people with service animals are able to ride the bus
21 without fear of harassment or intimidation. Since I
began earlier this year, we've also secured long-term
affordable tenancies for 31 households who
experienced discrimination by landlords because of
their housing vouchers. Given that the cost of

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housing one family in shelter for one year in the city costs on average \$95,000 a year, by keeping these 31 families housed and out of shelter, we've saved the city nearly \$3 million in averted shelter costs. We have secured another 70 set-aside apartments just this year that landlords have agreed as part of settling an enforcement action with the commission to hold exclusively for rental by voucher holders. Each of those apartments and set-asides expands and preserves the stock of affordable housing in the city for the entire life of that tenancy. Another almost 1,000 apartments are currently either occupied by voucher holders or being held exclusively for such renters as part of prior settlements with the commission. Again, had those families ended up in shelter, as happens to far too many housing voucher holders every year due to unlawful discrimination, the city would be paying over \$100 million a year in shelter costs. The Commission's enforcement actions have saved the city those costs while, most importantly, ensuring stable, long-term affordable housing for families in need. Since starting at the Commission, we have also begun systematically

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3 overhauling this agency's approach to handling
4 complaints from soup to nuts. We've restructured the
5 agency to move every available resource into intake,
6 enforcement, and training, making sure that we
7 dedicate as many resources as we can to enforcing
8 complaints, obtaining justice for New Yorkers, and
9 preventing future unlawful acts. In so doing, we are
10 streamlining our intake and enforcement process to
11 ensure that as many complaints are resolved as
12 quickly as possible, and ensuring that our processes
13 remain accessible to all people, no matter what
14 language they speak or what resources they have. We
15 are investing in our intake team, moving more
16 resources into that department, and front-loading
17 much of our investigatory work there to ensure that
18 we're able to move faster and get people the answers
19 they're seeking from us more quickly. Similarly, we
20 continue to invest in our spectacularly successful
21 pre-complaint interventions team, which focuses on
resolving source of income discrimination, disability
access discrimination, and other forms of
discrimination before litigation is started. These
are some of our most successful programs where we

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3 resolve someone's situation entirely, including
4 getting voucher holders fully leased up on average
5 within three and a half weeks after they first reach
6 out to us. We are also looking for other ways to
7 speed up our case investigation processes and ensure
8 that we're able to bring compassionate, cultural
9 competent, and community or industry-specific
10 expertise into our investigations process. As a
11 result, we've moved some of our community relations
12 experts into our enforcement division as non-attorney
13 case specialists. This allows people with specialized
14 talent in speaking to the public to lean into those
15 talents in case investigations and allows our
16 attorneys to lean into their expertise: litigation
17 and trials. Overall, this allows us to move cases
18 better, communicate more frequently and more
19 accessibly to complainants, and allows us to better
20 meet people where they are and provide them with
21 timely answers they're looking for. We have also
finally been able to fully staff up our impact
litigation team, known as our commission-initiated
complaints team, allowing for more targeted strategic
enforcement. We're also growing our mediations

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3 program and are in the process of hiring a new
4 Director of Mediations who will lead the work of
5 expanding and rethinking our mediations program to
6 allow more people to receive just resolutions more
7 quickly. Finally, we are investing in providing more
8 targeted and accessible trainings with a specialized
9 training team, as well as creating deeper
10 partnerships of trust with movement and
11 community-based organizations to allow us to engage
12 in more strategic outreach to specific industries and
13 communities experiencing a disproportionate amount of
14 unlawful discrimination. In every change we've made,
15 we've looked closely at the skills and expertise of
16 our staff, as well as their civil service titles. We
17 have an incredibly skilled and dedicated team here
18 across the agency, and we do not intend to let one
19 ounce of their talent go to waste. Each and every one
20 of these moves is aimed at ensuring that we can
21 squeeze more enforcement and more justice out of
every resource we have while providing better, more
compassionate, and accessible services to New
Yorkers. We are rethinking the way that we write, the
way that we talk, the kinds of notices we provide,

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3 ensuring that at every step of the process when
4 people interface with us, they feel heard, they feel
5 respected, and they understand what's happening to
6 them, they know what to expect, and they feel
7 included. Of course, not everyone will get the
8 answers from us that they're hoping for. Many
9 terrible things that happen to people are not
10 illegal, as any lawyer can attest. But the number one
11 thing that everyone is looking to government to
12 provide is to know that they've been taken seriously,
13 that their concerns have been looked into, and where
14 possible, that they receive restitution that they're
15 owed. We are overhauling this agency to ensure that
16 everyone who comes to us gets that. We certainly
17 could do a better job with more budget, reaching more
18 people faster. That's just math. But we will do a
19 substantially better job than we've done in the past
20 with whatever we're given.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Okay. So I'm
just going to start off with a few questions. I'll go
back later because there were a couple things I
wanted to ask clarification on based on the
testimony, but I'll start with the FY27 Executive

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3 Plan questions. So it includes OTPS reduction of
4 \$200,000 in fiscal 2026, and although this is a
5 one-time reduction, Commission's overall OTPS budget
6 is decreasing for FY27. So what are the main ways
7 this will prevent you from fulfilling your mandates?
8 Because I know we talked a little bit about this in
9 the preliminary hearing, but you know, because given
10 everything that you just talked about in your
11 testimony, there's clearly a lot of work that is part
12 of your mandate as a commission. So just curious to
13 hear your thoughts.

14 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Obviously, we fully
15 intend to fulfill our mandate under any
16 circumstances. Unquestionably, with more OTPS, we
17 could do more things that are funded by OTPS—
18 outreach and advertising and communications and
19 things like that. You know, but we intend to meet our
20 mandate in any event.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. So that I totally
fully trust that you guys will do. But, I guess let
me rephrase the question a little bit. How is it
going to sort of hinder or maybe slow down our
process? Like if you had more OTPs, like what are

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3 some of the areas or buckets of things that you do
4 that would be super helpful? You know, whether it's
5 manpower capacity-

6 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: So we can't spend
7 OTPs on manpower.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEE: I mean, not OTPS, sorry.
9 That I knew. Sorry. That's PS, yes, sorry.

10 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I can talk about
11 what we do spend OTPS on. We spend OTPS on things
12 like outreach campaigns. Obviously we also partner
13 with other city agencies to make use of their OTPS
14 budgets to work together. But that's the kind of
15 thing we spend it on. Same with things like
16 technology, you know, computer systems. There's a lot
17 of stuff that we spend OTPS on. But, you know, the
18 vast majority of our budget is PS.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Okay. Is the
20 reduction- was the reduction part of the Chief
21 Savings Officer exercise? And if so, how is this
amount determined in terms of what to-

CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Yeah, some
amount of that was part of the Chief Savings Officer.
So for example, one of the things that we canceled

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3 was a contract with a consultant for- to consult on
4 AI topics, which is something we're not going to be
5 able to do in this fiscal year, but contributed to
6 the Chief Savings Plan.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, great. And at the
8 prelim budget hearing, you testified that the
9 Commission was still finalizing its budget request
10 for the Executive Budget. So which requests did you
11 submit to OMB, and were any of them met?

12 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: We've submitted a
13 number of requests to OMB since I started, so we're
14 in regular communication and contact. There's been a
15 lot of back and forth.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Can you give some
17 examples of things that would- that you would want to
18 prioritize?

19 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: We have been asking
20 for help with the new case management system. Very
21 exciting topic.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: No, that's important.

COMMISSIONER CLARKE: And as well as
obviously more lines.

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3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. And CCHR's budget
4 request included \$10 million in personnel services
5 funding for 100 new positions over three years. If
6 allocated, do you anticipate being able to hire all
7 roles within the anticipated timeline?

8 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: If it were
9 allocated, yes, I think we could.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. And which titles
11 are most urgently needed?

12 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Every title is
13 urgently needed. No, I mean—

14 CHAIRPERSON LEE: [interposing] No, I hear
15 you.

16 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: No, you know, like
17 I've said, we've restructured the agency so that it's
18 more nimble with any budget allocation. And so we
19 can— we can staff up and staff down more effectively
20 without dramatically affecting the workings of the
21 agency. That's been one of our goals, and I think
we've been effective at it. So, it would be a scaled
up or down.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. And I understand
that your request to OMB also includes the need for

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3 new office space. Can you go into why the need for
4 the new office space and how much, and the funding
5 would be needed for the move?

6 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I can't answer about
7 the funding that would be needed for the move. You
8 know, there's a couple things. One is just basic,
9 like, organizational culture. We're trying to move
10 everyone into the same space so that we can have
11 more-- a better workflow, and we can involve everybody
12 more in everyone else's work. I think that'll squeeze
13 more efficiencies out of our team. And then obviously
14 we are right next to 26 Federal Plaza, and that makes
15 it hard for some people to come and visit us,
16 complainants in particular.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yeah. Very good point.
18 And it also includes capital funding for a new case
19 management system, which is what you mentioned. So
20 what feature is CCHR looking to have included in a
21 new case management system that the current system
22 does not include?

23 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I could take up the
24 whole hearing with that. I mean, I think the most
25 important thing is that the case management system we

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3 have now really wasn't built to be a case management
4 system. It's just a database, and it's extremely not
5 user-friendly to people who are not database experts,
6 and so we just need a more user-friendly system that
7 makes it easier both to automate some of our
8 communications with people, which I understand is one
9 of people's major complaints about us, which is
10 totally fair. People want to hear about their cases
11 more often, which would make that easier. I think we
12 spend our databases- it's extremely cumbersome. Like,
13 it can take 20 minutes to run a search, and that's
14 just time we could spend doing something else.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEE: And just- because I
16 remember- I think I asked this question during the
17 prelim hearing, but have there been conversations
18 with especially some of the more nimble smaller
19 agencies to be able to tap into, like, a pool of-
20 with other smaller agencies around some of the OTPS
21 costs, like technology and databases systems and
things, things of that nature? Have you had
conversations with OMB about that or the possibility
of pooling resources together for that purpose?

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3 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Yeah, we do work
4 with other agencies, particularly on things like
5 comms and campaigns, which I think are important to
6 do both from a, like, principled standpoint, but to
7 involve as many agencies as possible to have the same
8 voice about what this administration stands for. And
9 so we absolutely love working with other agencies and
we do so to also make better use of everyone's OTPS
budgets.

10 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: No, I think
11 specifically for things like technology, we are in
12 conversations with OTI-

13 CHAIRPERSON LEE: [interposing] OTI, yeah.

14 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: to see if
15 there's capital funds available for this new system.
16 The bulk of the price is the setting up of the new
17 system and then the annual licensing fee, which would
18 fall under our OTPS budget.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Which I know that a lot
20 of- especially with AI and technology improvements,
21 there's been a lot of creative solutions that are
less expensive than I've seen out there that have
been in helping government systems. So hopefully

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3 that's something they can look into. And just
4 clarification, what's the cost of the current
5 database for your budget?

6 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I don't know off the
7 top of my head.

8 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: We can get back
9 to you on what the annual subscription is.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, that'd be perfect.
11 And then the one-time addition, intracity funding of
12 \$310,000 in fiscal '26 for gender identity rights
13 education in partnership with the Department of
14 Health and Mental Hygiene, how was this program
15 developed?

16 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: So this
17 particular program came out of legislation from this
18 body. I think it was Intro 1200 last year that called
19 on the Mayor's Office for Racial Equity- or Equity
20 and Racial Justice to do a rights and resources
21 campaign for TGNCNBI New Yorkers. So- and we're named
one of the partners for that. One of the things, as
the Commissioner was talking about how we work with
other agencies, is that not every mayoral office or
agency has, like, contracting capacity, so- but they

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3 have funds. So we partnered with what is now the
4 Mayor's Office for LGBTQ Affairs and DOHMH who had
5 the funds in their coffers to fund this campaign, and
6 we provided the work and the art and those pieces. So
7 we're very excited to launch that. I'm not going to
8 say the date, but soon- during Pride Month to- and
9 th-this is the half of a larger campaign, so this is
10 the- this half is just rights for trans New Yorkers
11 to make sure that not only trans New Yorkers
12 themselves see a message of affirmation, that trans
13 rights are human rights, but that also employers and
14 housing providers hear and see that it is illegal to
15 discriminate against someone based on their gender
16 identity or expression.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEE: And do you anticipate
18 continuing the program beyond fiscal year '26,
19 hopefully?

20 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: We're- I'm
21 having a conversation today about that.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Nice, okay.

CHAIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: So hoping to be
able to leverage all of our sibling agencies' funds
to continue the message.

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3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. Thank you. And I
4 know our Deputy Speaker is going to have follow-up
5 questions on that one. So, and just really quickly
6 for- my last question is around source of income
7 discrimination. So, you know- and I know I'm
8 preaching to the choir, you know this, but it's when
9 the landlord refuses to rent to someone based on
10 their income source, particularly when it comes to
11 government assistance vouchers, things of that
12 nature. So, what percentage of your total complaints
13 filed were related to source of income
14 discrimination?

15 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: So I'm happy to
16 get back to you with the exact percentage, but what I
17 can share with you all is that it is the highest form
18 of housing discrimination that we see at the agency.
19 And right now, actually, this last fiscal year, we're
20 seeing a shift employment discrimination has
21 historically been the vast majority of our
complaints, and now housing is creeping up, and
they're closer than they've been in the past, which
makes sense with, you know, changes at the federal
landscape where folks can report discrimination.

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3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, great. It's good
4 to know that. And have you seen a change in the
5 number of complaints related to source of income
6 discrimination in FY26 compared to '25? I think you
7 pretty much answered that, but if you have, what do
8 you believe are contributing factors? You just
9 mentioned the federal government. Is there anything
10 logistically that is challenging that? Because I know
11 at least one of the complaints that we've heard also,
12 at least from the smaller landlord perspective, is
13 that sometimes the vouchers and the payments through
14 the city take a while to go through, and so then
15 they're left sort of not getting paid their rental
16 income as well. And so just wanted to hear your
17 thoughts. And also the employment requirements,
18 there's a lot of challenges with that too, so I just
19 wanted to hear.

20 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I think the increase
21 in source of income cases, you know, I don't think
it's bigger this fiscal year than last fiscal year in
a sort of nonlinear way. I think it's been increasing
over time for a number of reasons, and one of them I
think being that people know about it more. It's— it

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3 was a very hard— like, I remember when it was passed,
4 it was a very hard thing to explain to people, how it
5 works and what their rights are, and landlords are
6 and brokers are very adept at making people feel,
7 like, small for asking. And so I really think that
8 there has been a huge push by all of government and,
9 like, the nonprofit sector to make people know that
10 that's a right that they have, and that has changed a
11 lot. Brokers too, we do a lot of education with
12 brokers, and there's a small— we have, like, a small
13 core of credible messengers among brokers who really
14 push this as a legal issue. So I think there's other
15 structural things, again, like, that are going on,
16 but I— one of the biggest ones I think by far is just
17 education and letting people know.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Which is good. And then
19 now we just have to make sure the back end of things
20 keeps up with it. So, right. Okay. Thank you. Okay.
21 Chair Nurse?

18 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Thank you, Chair. I
19 just want to double down on your comment about the
20 case management system. Because I know, I mean, all
21 of us do an ex— a huge volume of case management. If

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3 it took 20 minutes to do a search, I think we would
4 all be revolting. So I think that's pretty abysmal.
5 And I guess I'm curious if you go to OMB and you say,
6 hey, we have a record of long wait times. We are
7 trying to address these cases faster. This would save
8 us both some money because it takes time-- saves time,
9 for personnel and capacity to get their work done.
10 What does OMB say to that?

11 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Like I said, we're
12 in a continuing conversation, but I'm pretty
13 confident about this one. I--

14 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] You're
15 confident that-- what do you mean?

16 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: That it's clearly a
17 need that we have. You know, there's a lot of, I
18 think, stuff on our end that we need to do to make it
19 happen. It's not going to happen overnight, but I
20 feel we've been in very amicable conversation about
21 it.

22 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. That's good to
23 know. So human rights law has expanded. It was
24 expanded well before last year. We keep adding on
25 more rights, which is great for a city and puts us--

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3 makes us the world-class city that we are. So how do
4 we do all of that work now with \$2 million less than
5 you have last year? I imagine in your portfolio work,
6 something- you got to look at it and something's
7 going to have to be cut down on. So what are the
8 specific areas that you're going to have to
9 compromise on with \$2 million less?

10 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I'm going to be
11 totally honest, we don't intend to compromise on
12 anything. We are- we did an aggressive restructuring
13 that I think is going to be effective. Obviously, we
14 have- in doing that restructuring, we have
15 prioritized enforcement over other things, but I
16 think that that's the appropriate priority given
17 where we are with the Trump administration and the
18 sort of federal rollback of civil rights, I think we
19 have an obligation to focus on the one thing that we
20 do that no one else does, which is providing justice
21 for victims of discrimination, particularly those who
can't afford a lawyer. We're also, honestly- I think-
you know, I don't come from government, and so, you
know, I don't always know how to do things, and I
might be doing things a little bit differently, but

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3 part of what we're trying to do is to avoid competing
4 with other agencies in any spaces that we can. So
5 we're leaning heavily on our other partner agencies
6 to do things like outreach and to do things like
7 joint education and do things as much as we can so
8 that we're not duplicating efforts. And so I really
9 genuinely- we don't intend to compromise on anything.

10 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: So what I'm hearing
11 is- and I'm drilling down not because I'm trying to
12 be aggressive towards you, but because I want to be a
13 partner towards you because I care about this work.
14 So you're restructuring and you're saying we're going
15 to cut down on outreach and communications, which is
16 in line what advocates said at our prelim that you
17 all didn't have the capacity to carry out outreach
18 and education campaigns, although you are saying this
19 is one of the most effective things that we could be
20 doing is letting New Yorkers know that this entity
21 exists. So what agencies are you going to be working
with most specifically?

22 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: So as a longtime
23 legal services lawyer, I can say wraparound holistic
24 services are always the most efficient way to provide

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3 services. We are leaning heavily on the Mayor's
4 Office of Mass Engagement to be the single point of
5 contact for services throughout the city. I do think
6 that that's the most effective and efficient way to
7 do it. I think for a long time this agency tried to
8 do everything, and I don't think that that's working.
9 I don't think it's sustainable long-term, and I don't
10 think it's the best use of our resources. So I
11 really— we intend to lean on Mayor's Office of Mass
12 Engagement, Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial
13 Justice. We're working closely with the Mayor's
14 Office to Combat Antisemitism and the Mayor's Office
15 for LGBTQ Rights, et cetera, et cetera to make sure
16 that we are making the best use of our joint
17 resources rather than us trying to duplicate what I
18 think other agencies are very capable of doing.

19 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Heard. And so I don't
20 want to go too far down the rabbit hole because I
21 have a bunch of questions, but when you're saying
you're restructuring, you're focusing heavily on
enforcement, what does that look like in terms of the
restructuring?

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3 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Yeah, so we've
4 grown. We've moved resources into our intake team. We
5 have now a sort of team of non-attorney investigators
6 to rely- to sort of do more of the pre-litigation
7 investigations so our lawyers can do more of the
8 lawyering. And we have now, like, a specialized team
9 of trainers that all they do is sort of compliance
10 and Know Your Rights and know your obligations
11 trainings, which we intend to do with our community
12 partnerships team to do more targeted outreach both
13 to small businesses and to sort of community-based
14 organizations, movement-based organizations, trying
15 to find the places where the most civil rights
16 violations are happening so we can do more targeted
17 and strategic outreach.

18 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. And then for
19 headcount, I know the Chair talked a little bit about
20 it, but what roles are you planning to reduce? And
21 are any of the vacancies that you had currently
filled or in line to be filled?

CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: So, if you're
asking about the vacancy reduction lines that we're
losing-

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3 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Yes.

4 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: the majority of
5 those are attorney lines. And so, but the— we have 13
6 vacancies currently, and those are a few attorney
7 lines, but the bulk is non-attorney enforcement
8 support. So, folks into our hotline to take reports
9 of discrimination, folks for this newly-created role
10 of civil rights case specialist who will help
11 investigate discrim— claims of discrimination, and
12 then a few folks throughout the agency for support.

13 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: And just a reminder,
14 how many people are currently supporting the hotline?

15 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: There are
16 currently eight people, and as part of the
17 commissioner's restructure, we're moving more folks
18 in there. So after we hire up fully, we should have
19 a team of 15.

20 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. Between the
21 Preliminary Budget hearing and today's hearing, have
you hired any new employees? I'm sorry if you just
said that.

CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: We have, yes.
Yeah, we've hired three new people since then.

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3 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

4 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: And then we
5 have, I think, I believe four people pending OMB
6 approval.

7 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. I know- and I
8 know we've talked a lot about the attorney positions
9 and that it's hard to recruit and retain folks. What
10 are some of the actions that CCHR is taking to make
11 those positions more attractive for prospective
12 employees?

13 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I will say that it
14 has been in the past hard to recruit attorneys. It's
15 not currently hard because attorneys who care about
16 this are, like, fleeing the federal government and
17 federal enforcement agencies. But it is hard to
18 retain. That is, you know- our salaries can make
19 other jobs more attractive. We intend to retain those
20 attorneys by- in our restructuring, we've created
21 more of a- different specialized roles that allow
lawyers as they go through the lifetime of their
career with us to take on more and more
responsibility and get more and more litigation
training. So the things that we offer that other

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3 public interest jobs of the same salary band don't
4 offer is a ton of trial experience, a ton of
5 litigation experience, and that's really, you know,
6 what we're trying to do, train people up, give them a
7 lot of real-world experience, and get-- and try to
8 build in some pathways to advancement for them within
9 the agency.

10 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: So when folks get a
11 lot of litigation experience and training, but not
12 the salary to go along with that, don't they most
13 likely want to leave?

14 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Depends on the
15 person.

16 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. That's a nice
17 answer. One of the available civil service titles you
18 have is for an agency attorney intern, which has a
19 minimum salary of just over \$72,000. How many
20 budgeted versus actual agency attorney interns does
21 the Commission have?

COMMISSIONER CLARKE: So agency attorney
intern is like a term of art for lawyers who are not
yet admitted to the bar. When they get admitted to
the bar, they do become Agency Attorney Ones, is my

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3 understanding. So it's— I don't think it's a
4 separate—

5 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: [interposing]
6 Correct. So when you look at Agency Attorney Intern,
7 it's at the bottom of a progression for agents or
8 folks. So it's basically just how many attorney lines
9 do we have funded? And I believe we are somewhere 20—
10 I think about 20, I think 20 attorneys currently. So
11 at any point, any of those folks could be an Agency
12 Attorney Intern, Agency Attorney One, Two, or Three?

13 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: We don't hire Agency
14 Attorney Interns that we don't intend to turn into
15 Agency Attorneys once they pass the bar and get
16 admitted.

17 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: And those folks
18 actually—

19 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] so
20 there's a clear pathway for full-time?

21 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Yes.

COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Yes.

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3 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: They are
4 full-time actually. The intern- Agency Attorney
5 Interns are full-time salaried, benefit employees.

6 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

7 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: They just have
8 two years to pass the bar and be admitted.

9 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Understood.

10 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: And then they're
11 at that point eligible to be an Agency Attorney One.

12 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: And is the hours and
13 average caseload comparable to other fields?

14 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Yeah, I think it's
15 pretty comparable. So, the average attorney caseload
16 is around 40. That's similar to Legal Aid Legal
17 Services.

18 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay, just a few more
19 questions. Similar, talking about the attorneys,
20 there are four levels of agency attorneys with
21 minimum salaries ranging from \$73,000 to 90- just
over \$96,000. What type of attorneys do you need the
most? Which- and which ones impact caseload the most?

COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I wish there was a
clean answer to this. People have differing opinions

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3 about whether it's better to hire more mid-level
4 people or just train up the people we have, but we do
5 definitely have a need for more experienced
6 litigators.

7 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: So more senior-level
8 attorneys. And you said, how does this impact
9 caseload?

10 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I mean, not every
11 attorney in our team does the same thing. Some people
12 specialize more in complex investigations or complex,
13 like, impact litigation, so there are different
14 people who have different kinds of skill sets and
15 specialty. But, you know, as a general rule, can more
16 experienced attorneys take on more? Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay, I'm going to
18 talk about the Racial Equity Plan, and then I'll turn
19 it back over to the Chair. So in April, they released
20 the Preliminary Plan. The Commission submitted a plan
21 which had short, medium, and long-term goals. The
first goal aims to increase community outreach in the
33 Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity
neighborhoods by the end of 2026. How many of the

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neighborhoods is the Commission currently conducting
3 outreach in?

4 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Yeah, in fiscal
5 year '26, we've conducted-- we've conducted outreach
6 in nearly all of them. Happy to give you back hard
7 data points of which neighborhoods specifically we've
8 been reaching out. But tree [sic] neighborhoods have
9 been a priority for this agency for the past two
10 years in outreach. And so, with that goal, it was
11 really trying to concretize and communicate the work
that we are already doing in those neighborhoods.

12 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay, and so you'll
let us know which ones you haven't targeted?

13 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Do you have a number,
15 like, out of the 33, you think there's, like, six
16 left or 10 left? You've covered two-thirds? 50
percent?

17 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: I can't give you
18 an exact number right now, but I'm happy-- I'm
19 confident that we've done-- more than the majority of
20 neighborhoods have had direct outreach to them. And
21 then separately, when there are-- for those who don't

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3 have direct outreach, we have connections to CBOs who
4 are placed in those zip codes.

5 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. So in
6 relationship to the decrease in budget, how are you
7 planning to continue that outreach to those remaining
8 neighborhoods?

9 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Yeah, I think as
10 the commissioner mentioned, we're really trying to
11 build relationships and pathways with offices like
12 the Mayor's Office for Mass Engagement, you know, the
13 Commission on Gender Equity, all of the agencies that
14 have specific outreach branches that can help us do
15 this work and are close to the ground. And then
16 separately, with our new created team of community
17 partnerships, we're focusing on having strategic
18 partnerships with movements and organizations in
19 those neighborhoods. And the shift here specifically
20 is where this agency wanted to be at the micro level
21 of outreach. We need to be at the macro level of
outreach, and we need to start working with folks who
have trust from the community and don't have to go
over that boundary of that trust in government. So
folks who are undocumented are more likely to go to a

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3 CBO that they trust. And so we need to be able to
4 equip those CBOs with the tools and information they
5 need to serve their community when they come in. So
6 that's the bit of the shift in the strategy.

7 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay, understood. And
8 just in relationship to the first medium-term goal,
9 expanding commission-initiated investigations- how
10 many have you launched in 2026?

11 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: So our
12 commission-initiated team is finally very recently
13 fully staffed. And then we- so we initiate- there's
14 like commission-initiated investigations and then
15 commission-initiated complaints and then a whole
16 universe of things in between. We have initiated a
17 bunch of investigations. I don't- I'm not going to
18 say off the top of my head because I don't know the
19 answer, but I know that we've initiated quite a
20 number of investigations into pay transparency, pay
21 equity issues, as well as- I'm going to forget them.
I think there's only one formal complaint, but when
we initiate an investigation, there's really a number
of purposes. One, it could turn into a complaint
which turns into litigation, but we also do it as a

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3 tool to work with community groups and organizers to
4 help support their work and their goals. And so if we
5 see what we think is a violation, we'll open up an
6 investigation as part of a larger push to hold that
7 landlord or that employer accountable. The goal is
8 not always litigation. I mean, as any lawyer can tell
9 you, the goal is almost never litigation. So we
10 invest— we open up a lot of investigations, and I
11 think it's our policy not to talk about them too
12 much, but we've launched probably a dozen or so
13 investigations this calendar year.

14 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

15 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: And now that we have
16 a fully staffed team, we will do more.

17 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: And how does— how
18 many— what does a typical investigation require in
19 terms of staff or personnel?

20 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: It totally depends
21 on the complexity of the investigation. Some things,
like, you know, like a huge landlord like Parkchester
where we think that there's violations happening in
like every unit in their portfolio, that's going to
take an enormous amount of attorney time, both for

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3 investigations and for litigation and for like
4 enforcement post-litigation. And then other cases,
5 you know, we're sending out requests for information,
6 it may be only one or two lawyers. So it fully
7 depends on the scope and the complexity. We intend to
8 have more high-impact complex cases that affect
9 larger numbers of people. Now that we have a
10 dedicated team for that, that's sort of the whole
11 goal of that team. And again, we intend to sort of
12 work with grassroots organizations to determine what
13 those strategic targets should be and to make sure
14 that we're supporting their work and meeting them
15 where they think we should be.

16 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay, understood. I
17 think last question on attorneys for a minute. How
18 many are currently on the enforcement team?

19 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I think we have 20
20 staff attorneys now. That's like frontline attorneys,
21 and then we have, I think, six supervisors, and then
senior management.

CHAIRPERSON NURSE: And what would be
your-- and did you say what your dream world number of
attorneys would be?

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3 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I would never put an
4 upper limit on that.

5 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Or what did you
6 request? What did you request for?

7 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Over the three
8 years, we requested for- I don't even know. I don't
9 want to say, because I don't know.

10 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: I think- I don't
11 have the exact number, but I can tell you 80 percent
12 of our request was for enforcement staff.

13 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: That includes our-

14 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: [interposing]
15 Yeah, that includes non-attorney-

16 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: enforcement staff,
17 non-attorney?

18 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Correct.

19 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

20 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Both. So it
21 includes attorney and non-attorney.

CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. Well, more than
20. You asked for more than 20, right?

CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Correct.

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3 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Right. Okay. I just
4 have- my last line of questioning before I turn back
5 to the Chair. There are some more that based on your
6 testimony, but I'll come back to you after we open it
7 up. This is on CORE's feedback. I'm sure you all saw
8 this, the score that CORE gave you all, it's 24. And
9 for the record, that means it's, it has limited
10 alignment with the racial equity rubric and has goals
11 that lack specificity or measurable outcomes for
12 community impact. So just curious, what's the plan to
13 improve this score? And have you started any
14 conversations?

15 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Yeah, we're
16 reaching out to CORE to better understand the score.
17 I think one of the things that's- for us right now as
18 we look at the score is there's no real rubric to
19 measure where points are awarded, where points are
20 taken off. And so once we have those conversations,
21 we're happy to align those pieces. But again, those
were goals that were set in place as part of the
process where I think the Mayor's Office for Equity
and Racial Justice and CORE both had opportunities to
comment along the process. So we're- we've been in

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3 communication with them, and we're happy to continue
4 those conversations. But as of now, we don't really
5 understand the score.

6 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: You take question with
7 the rubric is what you're saying.

8 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Just to
9 understand it.

10 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. I'm just
11 curious. Okay. So, you— they had specific goals for
12 each agency, four for CCHR. I won't ask about every
13 one of them, but the first one is to collaborate with
14 relevant departments to create training programs for
15 students in correctional facilities, dropouts, young
16 adults, handicapped, or mentally disabled
17 individuals. Do you all have the— one, the resources
18 to implement this, and capacity to do it?

19 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: It's an
20 interesting question because here's where— so I'm
21 going to answer this from someone who used to work at
the Department of Education.

CHAIRPERSON NURSE: I only ask interesting
questions.

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3 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: I know. We
4 currently don't have a pedagogue on staff, right? So
5 curriculum, we are doing everything we can, and part
6 of the Commissioner's restructuring is creating a
7 team that is dedicated to education on civil rights.
8 So moving folks into roles where their sole job is to
9 think about how we educate New Yorkers, how we
10 disseminate information. So, and as part of that
11 work, there's capacity in there for specifically
12 youth work. So we want to be growing all of our
13 teams, right? But here's one of the things that I
14 think I have been taking away from the Commissioner's
15 reorg, that there are needs and there are wants. And
16 while wants are negotiable, needs are not. And so we
17 have to meet the need of New Yorkers.

18 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I will say, in terms
19 of trainings, one need that we have that we need to
20 do internally before we're doing things like that is
21 to make our trainings accessible. I don't know if
you've taken one of our trainings recently, but, you
know, an agency full of lawyers is going to lawyer,
and we have to fix that. We have to be able to talk
to people. And so we are doing- we're, like, doing a

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3 360 about all of our communications. And I think for
4 trainings, our goal is not that we are able to train
5 everybody who needs to be trained. Our goal is to
6 make trainings and partner with people so that those
7 trainings can scale. Yeah.

8 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: No, I'm a huge
9 believer in train-the-trainers model. I think that's--
10 I think that's right. And I, as someone who's hosted
11 many Know Your Rights trainings by lawyers, I'm
12 always left translating what they're saying. Okay,
13 last one on-- I had a question on the third
14 recommendation is again to provide pathways for youth
15 to report discrimination complaints directly. Do you
16 have-- have you all considered what this would look
17 like? And do you-- again, do you have the capacity and
18 resources to take that on?

19 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: We are definitely
20 taking that one under advisement.

21 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: This one you, you
agree with?

COMMISSIONER CLARKE: No, we're looking
at, we're looking at it.

CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Oh, looking at.

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3 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: There's like limits
4 to, you know, minors filing complaints and stuff. So
5 we're figuring out what we can do there and what the
6 right approach is and what the right space is.

7 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: But we do want
8 folks to know that anyone at any point can call and
9 give an anonymous tip to the agency.

10 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Also, anyone can
11 call us, but in terms of outreach, we got to figure
12 out what our, what our most effective lane is, I
13 think there, especially for that one.

14 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

15 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Which I think is
16 important.

17 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. I'll turn it
18 back over to the Chair. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. So we're going to
20 go with a few member questions starting with Deputy
21 Speaker Williams.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. I
have a whole bunch of questions, but the first thing
I wanted to ask is- I was actually reviewing
then-candidate Zohran Mamdani's Trump-proofing New

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3 York City document, and in his document he said that
4 he would fund CCHR \$20 million- \$21 million. Which is
5 like significantly lower than what you have now. So I
6 just wanted to say that I'm like slightly
7 disappointed by that because I know that combating
8 hate crimes and discrimination across the board was
9 such a like pivotal component to his campaign. So, I
10 just want to state that and I just want to say I feel
11 like we went backwards because we have been fighting
12 really hard the last couple of years and we've had
13 some successes with allocations throughout the last
14 couple of years. So I don't know how we're going
15 backwards. I do hear the restructuring piece, and I
16 don't know, maybe sometimes you have to take a few
17 steps back to take 1,000 steps forward. Maybe that's
18 what you all are doing. But it does kind of feel like
19 we have moved backward with the funding. And then
20 just on the Mayor's office of Mass Engagement, while
21 I think that the intention of that off- that office
is amazing. I'm just concerned about stability
because when another administration comes on board,
like, what if they don't have an Office of Mass
Engagement? And then is that going to send CCHR

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3 scrambling again in terms of your engagement? So I
4 don't know if you have thought about, like, what
5 sustainability looks like if you are relying more
6 heavily on the Mayor's Office of Mass Engagement for
7 outreach.

8 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I will say in this,
9 like, world of politics moving very fast, we think
10 about sustainability of what we're doing all the
11 time. It's one thing to change things when, when I'm
12 in charge, and another thing if another
13 administration comes in with different ideas. I think
14 our agency is easily weaponized. So we do think about
15 sustainability with what we're doing all the time and
16 trying to make sure that we're not breaking something
17 that works for us now and won't work in the future.
18 So yes, we absolutely do think about that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. So I just
20 wanted to turn back to some of the questions on the
21 racial equity plan. I know the Chair asked a few of
the questions. So one of the medium goals is to
ensure current staff salaries meet New York City's
true cost of living thresholds by the end of 2028.
The true cost of living that was released alongside

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3 the Prelim Racial Equity Plan states that the
4 threshold for a single person with no dependents is
5 \$70,000 roughly. What percentage of staff currently
6 meet this threshold?

7 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Again, happy to
8 get back to you with the exact percentage, but the- I
9 think the majority of our staff is over \$70K. The
10 thing that makes the threshold itself very difficult
11 to calculate on a staff-by-staff level is because
12 includes the household income. And so we don't know
13 how many of our staff are are married, are- have
14 different variables. So what we want to do is focus
15 on the salary, and we have very few staff who are on
16 the lower end of that. So- and we've been working
17 since drafting that goal to move the staff at the
18 lowest end of salary up.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: And I know there
20 was some discussion on attorneys, and I know in
21 previous hearings we've always discussed the attorney
titles within CCHR, which sadly are a bit lower than
the Law Department. So I just wanted to know if there
has been any discussions around applying the similar
Law Department titles to CCHR staff with OMB?

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3 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: We have had
4 conversations about what other titles could be
5 available to us, and so we're hopeful that we can
6 have more titles in our pocket, I guess. Okay. One of
7 the strategies for this goal is to create a hiring
8 committee to assess current hiring practices and
9 operations. How would— who would be a part of this
10 team, and would it be existing employees or specific
11 staff for this purpose?

12 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: We already have a
13 hiring committee, but we're also hiring a new
14 Director of Mediations and EEO who will be leading
15 that work along with all of our internal EEO work. So
16 we're— but, you know, it'll include, like, our Deputy
17 Commissioner of Enforcement and our Director of
18 Operation— our Deputy Commissioner of operations, and
19 probably Jose. So it's going to include people from
20 all the verticals in our team to make sure that
21 we're doing a good job of applying our own principles
to our hiring process.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Jose can't do
all of the things, even though I know he tries. That
said, are current staffers going to be compensated

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3 for the extra work, or it's just going to be like
4 something else added to their portfolio?

5 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: The Director of
6 Mediations and EEO, that's fully within their- the,
7 the job description for their job.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay.

9 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: And then for
10 folks who participate, their workload is adjusted to
11 accommodate for it. So it's not, you know, what you-

12 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: [interposing]
13 Additional.

14 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Yeah.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. One of
16 your long-term goals is to improve accessibility at
17 each of CCHR's five borough offices by the end of
18 2034, which will include the development of a rubric
19 to gauge accessibility. How will the rubric be
20 developed and who will be included in forming the
21 rubric? And has CCHR begun to develop the rubric, and
what is the deadline for the rubric to be created?

COMMISSIONER CLARKE: So as part of our
Chief Savings Officer plan, and as well as part of
our restructuring, we are trying to centralize more

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3 people in the same office. Our bureau offices haven't
4 been open to the public really on any kind of walk-in
5 basis for a long time. And so we are trying to make
6 ourselves- we're trying to come to people more often.
7 We do mobile intake, we do intake at community groups
8 and things like that, so we are trying to make sure
9 that the offices that we do have open to the public
10 are accessible and we are working on that, but I
11 don't think it is our plan to have people coming to
12 our five borough offices.

13 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: And I will just
14 want to put a plug in, as, you know, the agency who
15 enforces disability discrimination, we have a great
16 team called Project Equal Access who is super versed
17 in building accessibility and so we are very excited
18 and lucky to be able to tap in their expertise to
19 help us accomplish this goal.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. Just
21 something with CORE, and I know we've had this
discussion before about increasing public
availability of disaggregated data. So of the data
that CCHR collects and reports on, how much and what

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3 is currently disaggregated? And what steps will you
4 take to ensure that all data is disaggregated?

5 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: So that is also
6 communicating part of the need for a new case
7 management system so that we can better run data
8 reports. Right now, our limit to how we disaggregate
9 information is based on either area of jurisdiction
10 or protected category. And so we have no automated
11 way right now to drill down into specifics of, uh, of
12 particular protected categories. And we're hoping
13 that with a new designed system, we will have that
14 capacity to be able to quickly drill down to our data
15 so that we can say- so when you say, Jose, I see- I'm
16 making this number up- I see that 40 percent of your
17 work is in gender discrimination. How does that
18 actually translate? How much of it is discrimination
19 against trans New Yorkers? How much of it is
20 discrimination against women? It's so difficult to
21 pull that data right now because it's manual. And so
with the new system, we're hoping to be able to build
into to it places where we can pull that type of
data.

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3 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: We are also very
4 careful about what data we collect because we're the
5 government and we don't have attorney/client
6 privilege with the people who come to us. So we try
7 to be extremely careful about what data we collect it
8 and when we need to collect it and when we don't.

9 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Yeah.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: And then just
11 like a follow-up question to some of the first round
12 of questions that I had about the restructuring of
13 CCHR's engagement, which I do appreciate that
14 approach, because as you know, I've had tons of
15 questions about, like, CCHR's engagement. I know you
16 have, like, a whole entire unit dedicated to
17 community engagement. What type of, like, regular
18 cadence of meetings and collaborations with other
19 agencies do you plan to do? Like, I know, for
20 instance, with DCWP, I remember having a lot of
21 conversations about that inter-partnership, and I
know that exists already, but as you think to build,
I guess, similar partnerships with other agencies,
what does that cadence look like?

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3 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Yeah, I- we
4 absolutely want to build a relationship where we have
5 regular standing meetings, whether that be monthly,
6 quarterly, every other month. But then separately,
7 what I think we're really hoping to do here is open
8 the door to have ad hoc things happen and be able to
9 meet more frequently and have relationships where
10 communication just flows naturally. I think with
11 Commissioner Clarke, we're seeing that with some of
12 the agencies that we're already working with where
13 the Commissioner to Commissioner communication is
14 flowing really well. And so we just want to make sure
15 that that trickles down to the staff level, so that
16 our community partnerships team and our
17 intergovernmental affairs team are communicating
18 regularly with folks.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yeah, like, when
20 I think of source of income and, like, HRA as an
21 example, like, I'm wondering, like, if a person is
getting a voucher, like, do they also get, like, a
one-pager that says if you have been discriminated
against- does that level, like, micro level of
coordination exist?

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3 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: We're definitely
4 building that across the different agencies, and I
5 think as well as, you know, pick up the phone
6 relationships to make sure that we can get people the
7 things that they need. So for example, in source of
8 income cases, we don't consider those cases closed
9 until the person is fully leased up, and like the
10 voucher is vouchering, and so we definitely make sure
11 that we have the relationships we need to make that
12 work for people.

13 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: And that's
14 exact- that question is exactly the spirit of the
15 strategy of the reorg is find people where the entry
16 point actually is. So like working with corrections
17 or people who are being- re-entering into society, do
18 they know about fair chance housing, fair chance
19 employment, those types of things, and catch them
20 where they are, not where we want to find them.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, great. Just want
to recognize we've been joined by Council Member
Hanif on Zoom. And with that, we are going to go to

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3 Council Member Hudson as well as— and then Council
4 Member Wong.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so much,
6 Chairs. And good morning. I just have a couple of
7 questions, but I wanted to make one note about your
8 testimony. If my math is correct, it appears as
9 though you brought in— and maybe that's the wrong
10 terminology, but saved perhaps or won \$2.15 million,
11 whether through restitution or damages or civil
12 penalties. Plus you mentioned saving about \$3 million
13 in shelter costs. So first, thank you. Great job. The
14 other thing though that I didn't hear mention of was
15 that you've incurred an almost \$2 million cut. And so
16 I just wanted to note that on the record for an
17 agency, a small agency, that is saving as much money
18 as you are and winning damages and penalties and
19 restitution in the amount of over \$2 million, I think
20 the loss of that funding is perhaps misplaced, I'll
21 say. So I wanted to just ask a couple of questions
about source of income discrimination which, as you
know, is when a landlord refuses to rent to someone
based on their income source, particularly when
someone will pay with government assistance. Can you

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3 share what percentage of your total complaints filed
4 were related to source of income discrimination?

5 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: So I think we don't
6 have the number on us, but I think it's- I'm going
7 to- it's somewhere around a third, but we can get
8 back to you with specific numbers.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. And, how do
10 you work with HRA to address source of income
11 discrimination complaints clients attempting to use
12 CityFHEPS vouchers?

13 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I mean, I think,
14 like I said, we sort of- most of our work is with the
15 landlords to make sure that the landlords are doing
16 the things that they need to do. We work with city-
17 with HRA sort of the same way an advocate would, I
18 think, through the various home-based providers and
19 also, you know, contacting them directly when we need
20 to to make sure that people get leased up. But
21 primarily our enforcement is directed at the
landlords and the brokers themselves.

CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: There is one
direct example for you, just concretely, of when
folks have a voucher and they come to us but their

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3 voucher is, like, about to expire. We can speak
4 directly with folks to have— directly with HRA to
5 have those vouchers extended. So that's one concrete
6 way and one way that we track how we help folks
obtain housing opportunities.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you. And to
8 date, how many source of income discrimination
9 complaints have been filed by HRA clients attempting
10 to use CityFHEPS vouchers in fiscal 2026, and can you
compare that to the numbers in fiscal '25?

11 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: So we— I would say a
12 healthy percentage of our source of income cases are
13 not complaints that get filed. People call us and we
14 intervene in our early intervention process. In those
15 cases, it depends on what the situation is. If it's
16 like with a broker, we may not even know what the
17 kind of voucher is because it's sort of irrelevant in
18 getting the broker to knock it off. So it definitely—
19 like, we don't keep all of the data for everybody,
20 and it depends, and I don't think we know off the top
21 of our heads, but we can look at what we have and get
back to you.

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3 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. That would
4 be great. And then I have just one last question,
5 Chairs. Have you seen a change in the number of
6 complaints related to source of income discrimination
7 in fiscal '26 compared to fiscal '25?

8 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Yeah, we're in
9 the process of pulling together the numbers for
10 fiscal '26, because what we do is- I'm sure the
11 council knows this- we submit our annual report in
12 September to the Council, which really aggregates all
13 of our work across how many reports we've had, how
14 many pre-complaint interventions we've done, how many
15 complaints have been filed. And so we do that
16 annually because, again, our case management system
17 is hard to pull data from. So we're- at the end of
18 June, we'll pull the entire year and then we'll run
19 comparators to FY25. But I can just tell you that
20 anecdotally, if you look at the past four years of
21 our data, you can see the increase and you can see
how housing is creeping up to be equal to employment
discrimination.

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3 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. And do you
4 have any specific theories and what you believe to be
5 the contributing factors?

6 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I mean, I think it
7 is, like, I— largely an issue of education, making
8 sure that people know that it's illegal. I think part
9 of what education does is it does give people, like,
10 the power to stand up for themselves. We get a lot
11 more complaints with people who have, like,
12 videotaped their landlord and broker than we ever did
13 before. That is incredibly effective. And so
14 partially it's that. Partially it's the success of
15 our precomplaint intervention team. They are very
16 successful. Most people, we get them leased up within
17 three or four weeks. That means that more advocates
18 send us more clients, and so part of it is the
19 success of our program, but I think— I don't want to
20 pretend that it's not having to do with there being
21 more source of income discrimination. I'm sure there
is.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Great. Thank you
both. Thank you, Chairs.

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3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Okay, Council
4 Member Wong?

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you, Chairs. I
6 don't have a sense, based on reading your testimony,
7 like, how many cases you serve in a year and what is
8 the breakdown? Like, how many are involved
9 discrimination or antisemitism or that? Do you have
10 that data?

11 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Yeah, I'm happy
12 to share with you our annual report for fiscal '25,
13 and then when we publish 26's, happy to share that
14 with you as well. It will break down every report of
15 discrimination we have received, including things
16 that are— fail to state a claim for under the Human
17 Rights Law. It will have data for everything that we
18 have done early intervention for. It will have data
19 for every complaint that we have filed. And it will
20 have data on the closures of our cases, whether how
21 many we have settled, how many we have done a
probable cause determination, how many we've
administratively closed, and the metrics of how many—
how much damages we've secured for New Yorkers in
that year, usually in the millions, and then how many

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3 civil penalties for the City of New York, usually in
4 the hundreds of thousands.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yeah, okay, that
6 takes me to my next question. Now, with the proposed
7 \$2 million budget cut in your commission, how are you
8 gonna do your work if- like, anti-Semitic incidents,
9 are up and so is discrimination complaints. How are
10 you going to address that with this budget cut?

11 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: So, absolutely. Like
12 I said, we fully have reorganized our agency to make
13 sure that we're able to get more enforcement out of
14 any amount that we have. And we do intend to do that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. I want to
16 follow up on anti-Semitic complaints. 57 percent of
17 reported hate crimes last year involve anti-Semitic
18 incidents. What capacity does your agency have for
19 Queens communities that are facing those incidents?
20 Can you talk about it?

21 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Absolutely. So I
want to make clear that what we do- the Human Rights
Commission, we do civil rights. So that's housing
discrimination, employment discrimination,
discrimination in public accommodations. We work very

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3 closely with the NYPD to refer hate crimes, but we
4 don't actually handle things that are violent crimes.
5 And part of, I think, the benefit of our intake line,
6 as well as our community partnerships, is making sure
7 that everyone comes to us, gets the resources they
8 need to go to the place that can help them out with
9 whatever their issue is. We do take issues of
10 discrimination, bias, hatred, bigotry towards the
11 Jewish New Yorkers very, very seriously. And we do
12 have- we do the- have both the capacity to enforce
13 those cases, and we do a lot of outreach on those
14 issues as well.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay, so you
16 mentioned that you work with the NYPD Hate Crimes
17 Task. So how does it work? Do they refer cases to
18 you, or is it the other way around? What? How does
19 the flow work?

20 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: We refer cases to
21 them.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: And then they take
23 over?

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3 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: We don't have the
4 jurisdiction to be enforcing criminal statutes, so we
5 refer things to them.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: See, okay. Thank
7 you.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Actually, I
9 had a clarifying question. So a slightly different
10 way of asking, which is- because I know- I fully
11 trust that you guys are going to fulfill the mandate
12 given despite all of everything. But if you could
13 give me a sense of what the caseload looks like, and
14 I know it varies because some of them are short-term
15 cases and can be resolved quickly, whereas others are
16 more complicated. But just on average, if you could
17 give a sense of what the caseload is per person who
18 has-

19 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: So a very high-level
20 average is about 40 cases per person.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEE: 40 cases per- okay.

COMMISSIONER CLARKE: You know, again,
that's not sort of reality in the sense that if
someone's at trial with a very complicated case, are
they also doing their other 39 cases? Probably not.

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3 And other people are absolutely able to be banging
4 out 60 cases at a time.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEE: And then with the
6 reduction in the overall budget, how is that going to
7 change caseload per person that's working?

8 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: So again, you know,
9 though- as I'm learning in government, there's a
10 difference between- or there was a difference between
11 headcount and actual physical humans in your agency.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Right.

13 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: So, we don't intend
14 for there to be any change in people.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEE: So, okay. So the
16 caseload that you currently have right now was
17 already being handled by the same number of folks
18 that were already in positions.

19 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: And we've brought
20 on a number of attorneys since I started
21 successfully.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Did you want-

23 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Oh, and because
24 we've sort of moved, we now have a crew of
25 non-attorney case specialists to do investigations

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3 that'll help move attorneys off of investigations and
4 to sort of get through their cases more effectively.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Right.

6 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: So if this is at
7 all helpful, Chair Lee, the way the Commission used
8 to operate was only attorneys were doing the
9 investigative work. And so with part of the reorg and
10 trying to use every single resource available to us,
11 is including folks who are not attorneys into the
12 enforcement work who will also be sharing that
13 casework now. So now, while the average is 40 cases,
14 we'll have more people who could have an average of
15 40 cases.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Right. And it's the same
17 sort of, I guess, model as, like, community health
18 workers or peer support navigators who can help with
19 that work, and so that the clinical folks can do the
20 other more clinical things that they normally do. So
21 it seems to be the same kind of model where now
you're shifting the responsibilities, which is great,
because then hopefully it builds capacity. So-

COMMISSIONER CLARKE: And it's the same
model that the Department of Labor at the federal

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level and other agencies are doing to lean in.
3 There's no reason that lawyers needed to be doing
4 everything.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yeah. Okay, perfect. And
6 I'm going to pass it back to Chair Nurse.

7 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Thank you. Just a
couple questions based on your testimony. And we've
8 talked a little bit about it in prelim in terms of
9 the pre-complaint interventions team. How many people
10 are on this team? How many now? How many are you
11 looking to increase by?

12 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Six, and we have— in
the restructuring, we're increasing it by one.

13 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: It sounds so small.
14 Okay, so you have six—

15 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: [interposing] Small
but mighty.

16 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: and you're increasing
17 by one. Okay. And I think you've talked about it
18 before, but what are the types of complaints that are
19 most successful when they go through this process?

20 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: So historically we
21 primarily do physical disability access, that's like

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3 ramps and rails and handlebars, as well as source of
4 income discrimination. We're growing our disability
5 access team, that's the one, the one extra. And we're
6 also, because we are bringing on our non-attorney
7 case specialists who will also be able to do a little
8 bit more of the source of income work specifically,
9 because that's, I think, amenable to people who are
10 going to be new to the investigations, like,
11 practice. We're trying to expand our pre-complaint
12 intervention work to include things like pregnancy
13 discrimination and fair chance housing and other
14 things where early, quick, authoritative intervention
15 can be very effective, where a phone call from the
16 government saying you're not allowed to do this is
17 helpful.

18 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay, and then in the
19 premeditation—

20 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: [interposing] Okay,
21 I was wrong about the numbers. It turns out our team
is eight and now it's nine.

CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Oh, okay, instead of
six.

COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Yeah.

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3 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: So eight, you
4 increased by one for nine.

5 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: We have, like, our
6 own terminology for everything, so there's, like-

7 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Sorry.

8 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: the precomplaint
9 interventions team, which doesn't include our project
10 equal access team, even though that's also
11 pre-complaint intervention, so- sorry about that.

12 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Totally understood.
13 With regard to voucher holders, the pre-mediation
14 team you mentioned normally gets complaints resolved
15 in an average of 3.5 weeks. Are people in that
16 period- they're still remaining in emergency housing,
17 or where are those folks during that time typically?

18 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: It totally depends.
19 So the three and a half weeks is all our different
20 kinds of early interventions, so obviously some
21 source of income takes longer, which means that some
of our other interventions are done faster. We do
source of income in all different kinds, so there's
people who are in emergency housing, people who are
in their housing and are trying to start paying

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3 CityFHEPS to stay, so they're still staying in that
4 apartment. We do tell landlords that they have to
5 hold those apartments vacant when it is someone who's
6 looking to move into a new apartment. We put a sign
7 on the door. We do everything that we can to make
8 sure that that apartment remains available to them
9 until we're done.

10 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. Just a few more
11 questions. The new Director of Mediation role that
12 you're looking to hire, what would the civil service
13 title be?

14 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: It is, I
15 believe, Executive Agency Counsel, and I will confirm
16 that.

17 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I think that's
18 right.

19 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

20 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Yes. Executive
21 Agency Counsel.

COMMISSIONER CLARKE: This is above my
pay grade, understanding civil service titles.

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3 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: And in the
4 restructuring- I find that such a private sector
5 terminology.

6 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I know, I'm sorry.

7 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: I'm like, what do you
8 mean?

9 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: We call it the
10 reorg, but then it like doesn't-

11 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: When someone says it,
12 I'm like, okay. Okay, so in that, are- is everyone
13 keeping their civil service titles?

14 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

16 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Part of what we were
17 doing in the restructuring is we had a big a mess of
18 civil service titles that was not equitable, where
19 people with different civil service titles did the
20 same job. That's really not what we want for people.
21 It's not fair. So part of what we're doing in the
restructuring is making sure that people with the
same civil service titles are doing the same work, et
cetera.

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3 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. And then last
4 question for the community relations experts that are
5 being moved into more enforcement-oriented roles as
6 non-attorney case workers or case specialists, is
7 this similar to a paralegal role?

8 COMMISSIONER CLARKE: No, so that's a
9 great question. So we're-- so the community relations
10 specialists, some of them are becoming the community
11 partnership specialists. That's again deeper
12 partnerships. Some who were doing some trainings as
13 part of their prior job are now trainings experts.
14 Some are becoming intake specialists and some are
15 becoming case specialists. The case specialist really
16 is more of a case detective. It's taking testimony
17 under oath, it's doing discovery, it's-- I mean,
18 pre-litigation discovery, requests for information,
19 looking through emails, looking through the whole
20 thing, really trying to figure out and get to the
21 bottom of the case before we decide whether to
litigate the case and find probable cause or not.
That's the goal. It's much-- it's a much more involved
on-the-ground kind of work rather than supporting an
attorney. It's really being the inner face with the

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3 complainants and respondents as well. And part of the
4 goal here really was to make sure, because our
5 community relations specialists know how to talk to
6 people and they- you know, they, like, have expertise
7 in the industries that we're often working in, that
8 we're bringing that expertise into case
9 investigations rather than having lawyers who, again,
10 not always the best at talking to people, removing
11 them from that sort of frontline interaction where
12 they don't need to be there.

13 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay, that's going to
14 be the end of my questions. But I just wanted to
15 double down on what the Deputy Speaker said in terms
16 of the appearance that we are going backwards. I know
17 she fought really, really hard over the last four
18 years to move the funding dial forward. And so I
19 think perhaps, like a new organizational chart, if
20 you could share that with the Council so we can be
21 also a part of helping to do that ongoing assessment
of how did this reorganization and restructuring
create those efficiencies and how it's helping to
sustain or decrease, like, wait times and things like
that. I also just, you know, I loved in your

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3 testimony that you brought dollar amounts in terms
4 of, like, what you are able to deliver for New
5 Yorkers. I mean, just highlighting a few- \$1 million
6 in restitution for victims of discrimination,
7 \$200,000 in civil penalties, \$350,000 in damages for
8 victims of disability discrimination, \$600,000 in
9 damages for victims of employment discrimination,
10 from race discrimination to pregnancy discrimination
11 to sexual harassment. I mean, this is life-changing
12 work for people, and so if we're shortchanging this
13 agency, I'm really, really concerned. I trust that
14 you came in and you said, I got to take on this
15 project of trying to find efficiencies. And I believe
16 that you're doing it to the best of your ability. But
17 I think that from our point of view, whenever we see
18 such cuts and seeing that what you got, like, the
19 second biggest decrease out of all the agencies,
20 like, that rings alarm bells for us, particularly
21 given the broader political context we're in and the
dangers, the real dangers that people are facing. We
really want to be a partner to you in making sure
that we're not losing out on the gains that were

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3 made, particularly by the former Chair here over the
4 last four years. So that's it for me.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEE: No, I just want to echo
6 what the Chair just mentioned about putting dollar
7 numbers to the savings, because I don't think a lot
8 of people fully- because they're looking at the
9 budget in terms of here and now. But I think what
10 folks, and what I always try to look at is, okay, if
11 we're investing this much now, how much will this
12 save us as a city later in the out-years? And so I
13 think it's important to keep that lens, which I'm
14 glad you mentioned in your testimony. And I just, you
15 know, I commend you on doing a lot with very little,
16 and I appreciate that you've been able to address a
17 lot of the concerns. And hopefully moving forward, as
18 the Chair and Deputy Speaker mentioned, we can move
19 forward with the budget and actually, hopefully see
20 improvements in investments versus going backwards.
21 So- okay. And I think that's it on our part, unless
Deputy Speaker or anyone else, if you guys had more
questions.

COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Thank you so much.

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3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Thank you so
4 much.

5 CHIEF OF STAFF RIOS LUA: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, so we're going to
7 take a recess until our next hearing at 12 p.m. with
8 Parks and Recreation.

9 [break]

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Ladies and gentlemen,
11 please settle down. We are going to begin shortly.
12 Please find your seats. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Good afternoon
14 and welcome to the second FY27 Executive Budget
15 hearing for the day focusing on the Department of
16 Parks and Recreation. I'm Councilmember Linda Lee,
17 and I'm pleased to be joined by my colleague, Council
18 Member and Chair Ty Hankerson, who's chair of the
19 Committee on Parks and Recreation. We have been
20 joined by our Deputy Speaker Williams, Council Member
21 Marte, Council Member Brewer, Council Member Morano
on Zoom, Council Member J. Sanchez, Council Member
Narcisse, and I think that's everyone so far. Okay.
So welcome, Commissioner, Tricia Shimamura and your
team. Thank you all for joining us today to answer

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3 our questions. And on May 12th, 2026, the
4 administration released the Executive Financial Plan
5 for fiscal '26 to 2030 with a proposed fiscal '27
6 budget of \$124.7 billion. The Department of Parks and
7 Recreation proposed fiscal '27 budget of \$685.4
8 million represents less than one percent of the
9 administration's proposed FY27 budget in the
10 Executive Plan. And this is an increase of \$31.4
11 million, or 4.8 percent, from the \$654 million
12 originally budgeted in the FY27 Preliminary Plan.
13 This increase results from several actions, mostly
14 the baselining of previous one-shots, snow removal
15 overtime costs related to this year's blizzards, and
16 the Wildlife Conservation Society's shortfall. As of
17 April 26th, Parks and Recreation's headcount was 236
18 less than their fiscal '26 budgeted headcount for a
19 vacancy rate of 4.6 percent. In the Council's
20 Preliminary Budget response, we called on the Mayor
21 to add \$27.7 million to the Department of Parks and
Recreation's budget to invest in critical services,
including forestry management, Park rangers, stump
removal, which is my personal favorite, the Green
Thumb program- yay, all these are all amazing- city

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3 park worker, park enforcement patrol. During a time
4 where social activities are rising in costs, parks
5 remains free to our city residents and provides a
6 space for activities, programs, and fellowship. And
7 as we all saw, especially during COVID, it really was
8 a very, very important third space for our
9 communities, and the Council remains committed to
10 keeping such spaces free and accessible to residents.
11 We were pleased to see that our request was partially
12 included in the plan, with some positions being
13 baselined, and we are grateful for that step forward.
14 Today we would like to hear from the Commissioner
15 about the outlook for parks employees who are still
16 uncertain about their employment status coming July,
17 and how we can work together to ensure that they are
18 supported. And I now want to turn it over to my
19 Co-chair for this hearing, Council Member Ty
20 Hankerson, for his opening statement.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Chair.
Good afternoon and welcome to the Parks and
Recreation Committee's hearing on the FY27 Executive
Budget for the Department of Parks and Recreation. My
name is Ty Hankerson. I am the Chair of the Parks and

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3 Recreation Committee. I'd like to acknowledge my
4 fellow council members who are present here today, to
5 which they were acknowledged already. Today we will
6 be hearing testimony from DPR on its FY27 Executive
7 Budget, which totals \$685.4 million, a decrease of
8 \$2.2 million compared to the FY26 adopted budget.
9 While we still have not reached the one percent mark
10 that was promised by the Mayor during his campaign,
11 this is absolutely a step in the right direction.
12 There is money for tree planting programs, seasonal
13 staff and the adding more than 120 positions to the
14 baseline. This means that more than 120 people will
15 not have to worry about the existence of their jobs
16 come July. But there's still work to be done to help
17 the park staff that do not have that same luxury.
18 While I am very happy about the baseline positions, I
19 don't want to fail to mention the other great parts
20 of this budget: \$1.7 million for additional seasonal
21 positions to help out during the FIFA World Cup, \$3
million in baseline forestry management funding, \$3.7
million for overtime to those parks workers that
shoveled snow during the blizzards this year, and
more than \$2 million for tree planting. All great

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3 things, but as always, there is more to be done. The
4 FY27 preliminary budget includes \$27.1 million in new
5 needs for FY27, \$6.3 million in other adjustments,
6 and \$2 million in savings. I am personally very happy
7 to see the expansion of several parks jobs into the
8 baseline and can't wait to see the remaining
9 one-shots baselined as well— and can't wait to see
10 the remaining one-shots baselined as well. One more
11 time. And can't wait to see the remaining one-shots
12 baselined as well. The committee is excited to hear
13 testimony related to FY27's Executive Plan,
14 specifically baseline one-shots, lifeguards, and
15 concession revenue. Before we begin with testimony, I
16 would like to thank council staff for their hard
17 work. Our finance team, Eisha Wright, Jack Storey,
18 Owen Kotowski [sp?], and Michael Sherman [sp?]. Our
19 committee staff, Christopher Satori [sp?] and
20 Patrick Mulvihill— Mulvihill [sp?], excuse me. And my
21 own staff, my Chief of Staff Maricela Cano [sp?],
and my special advisor Clive Destiny [sp?]. I will
now ask the Committee Counsel to go over some
procedural items and swear in the representatives
from the department.

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3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you, Chair. So
4 before we get started, just want to— as a quick
5 reminder for this year's Executive Budget joint
6 hearings, we're going to be doing all the public
7 testimony on one amazing day. We're going to have a
8 great party on June 10th. I shouldn't oversell this.
9 Wednesday, June 10th, beginning at 9:30 a.m. We're
10 doing all the public testimony on one day, so please
11 remind folks in the community that they should sign
12 up for Wednesday, June 10th for the public hearings.
13 And now I will turn it over to Committee Counsel to
14 swear in the witnesses for their testimony.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good afternoon. May
16 you all raise your hands? Do you affirm to tell the
17 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth
18 before this committee and to respond honestly to any
19 council member questions?

20 UNIDENTIFIED: I do.

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin.

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Great. Good
afternoon, Chair Lee, Chair Hankerson, and members of
the Finance Committee and Parks Committee, and other

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3 members of the Council. My name is Tricia Shimamura,
4 and I am pleased to be here today to testify as
5 Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks
6 and Recreation regarding the agency's Executive
7 Budget for fiscal year 2027. And to be joined today
8 on this panel by several members of our agency's
9 senior leadership. First, I want to recognize the
10 Council for its continued support of our city's open
11 spaces, and for championing the importance of parks
12 for all New Yorkers. Thank you for the opportunity to
13 provide an update on our agency's efforts to build
14 and maintain a healthy and thriving park system. The
15 arrival of warmer weather in the spring means we're
16 heading into our peak season, when our city's green
17 and open spaces truly come alive and more people get
18 outdoors and take advantage of our amazing parks,
19 beaches, pools, to lead happier and healthier lives.
20 In the two months since we appeared before the
21 council to discuss the Preliminary Budget, we have
been busy delivering results for New Yorkers,
striving for excellence in the public realm, and
proving each and every day that our parks and open
spaces are a crucial component to the Mayor's vision

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3 to make this a more affordable city, because parks
4 are for everyone. Our playgrounds are for every
5 child. And so for the last month, we have been proud
6 to unveil the fully reconstructed children's play
7 area at Hamilton Fish Park in Manhattan, and the full
8 renovation of Cuyler Gore Park in Brooklyn, and break
9 ground on a full reconstruction of Captain Mario
10 Fajardo Playground within Kissena Corridor Park in
11 Queens. These projects are creating new play areas
12 for different age groups and abilities, providing
13 exciting new opportunities for children to explore,
14 move, and play together. Our basketball courts are
15 for everyone, and basketball is a lifeblood of the
16 city. Let's go Knicks. So we were thrilled to open
17 up— to fully open reconstructed basketball courts at
18 Fort Four Playground in Washington's Walk in the
19 Bronx, made possible from the support of council and
20 mayoral funds. We also unveiled the newly
21 reconstructed Grant Park also in the Bronx, a \$17
million capital project made possible through the
Jerome Avenue rezoning initiative, conforming a
former roadbed and unused lots into 4.7 acres of park
with an open lawn area, basketball court, and other

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3 amenities. Our cultural institutions, just like our—
4 including our city's incredible botanical gardens,
5 are for everyone. So we recently completed a \$4
6 million project to transform the pedestrian overpass
7 over the Bronx River Parkway, connecting Bronx Park
8 East residents to the New York Botanical Gardens, one
9 of the most— world's most distinguished botanical
10 gardens and a New York City cultural treasure. Our
11 city waterways and shorelines are for everyone, and
12 they are critical for the health and safety of New
13 Yorkers and marine wildlife alike. So our Office of
14 Marine Debris Disposal and Vessel Surrendering has
15 been keeping our city waterways clear with marine
16 hazard— of marine hazards. We have just announced the
17 expansion of our Marine Vessel Turn-in program so we
18 can take in vessels that owners can no longer take
19 care for before they become derelict, building on the
20 great progress we've already made in cleaning up over
21 120 derelict vessels clogging our waterways. Our
public art is for everyone, so we unveiled for the
first time a new permanent commemorative public
artwork in a New York City park in over five years,
installed in Elizabeth H. Berger Plaza in Manhattan

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3 to celebrate the literary legacy of New York's first
4 Arabic-speaking community and shine a light on an
5 often-forgotten facet of our city's diverse history.
6 Our urban forest is for everyone, and it serves as an
7 essential living infrastructure to keep our city cool
8 and resilient. So we were proud to stand alongside
9 the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental
10 Justice, and other partners to announce the city's
11 first-ever urban forest plan, a comprehensive roadmap
12 to preserve our tree canopy, plant more trees, and
13 cultivate an ecosystem of stewardship. The plan laid
14 out the city's goal of achieving 30 percent canopy by
15 2040 so that every New Yorker can enjoy the vital
16 benefits that trees provide—advancing environmental
17 justice, mitigating heat impacts, and improving our
18 quality of life. Our recreation centers are for
19 everyone, so we have been extremely gratified to see
20 how quickly the local community has embraced the
21 newly opened Shirley Chisholm Recreation Center in
East Flatbush, Brooklyn, where we have already
enrolled over 11,000 new members. Later this year, we
look forward to opening the brand new Mary Cali
Dalton Recreation Center in Staten Island, as well as

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3 reopening well-loved recreation centers after
4 extensive and much-needed renovations, including Lost
5 Battalion Hall in Queens, Owen Dolen Recreation
6 Center and St. Mary's Recreation Center in the Bronx,
7 and Sunset Park Recreation Center in Brooklyn. Last
8 but not least, our city's swimming beaches are for
9 everyone. Though the weather was not quite what any
10 of us had hoped for this Memorial Day, it was still a
11 great start to the season, as we opened up all of our
12 public beaches for swimming. Our tireless maintenance
13 and operations staff are out in full force keeping
14 our beaches and boardwalks clean, and our dedicated
15 Parks Enforcement Patrol officers are keeping
16 swimmers and beachgoers safe, as are our incredible
17 beach lifeguards. We are pleased to report that over
18 the weekend, the agency's active lifeguard corps
19 currently stands at 370, a significant increase over
20 this point in time last year. As we continue to train
21 and certify additional new and returning lifeguards
our staffing levels will increase, typically reaching
their peak around the 4th of July after our outdoor
pools have opened, and we hope to ultimately exceed
last year's staffing peak of 1,082 lifeguards

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citywide. We were especially thrilled to reopen the beautiful and historic Orchard Beach Pavilion to the public for the first time since 2009. This \$114 million reconstruction project advanced in partnership with the New York City Economic Development Corporation, restored the historic architecture of the landmark building, providing greater ADA accessibility, and revamped concession and community spaces, enhancing the visitor experience. We are proud to have restored the Pavilion to its historic glory, with a level of investment that properly reflects this incredible beach's place in the hearts of Bronxites and all New Yorkers. Turning to the specific topic for this hearing. The fiscal year 2027 Executive Budget reflects the administration's ongoing commitment to fiscal responsibility amid economic and fiscal challenges facing the city while maintaining critical services for all New Yorkers and investing in a greener, healthier city. The operating budget for our agency in the FY27 executive budget is \$685.4 million, a \$31.4 million increase from the Preliminary Budget, reflecting the addition of a

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3 significant new needs expense funding, including, as
4 you mentioned, the \$15 million in baseline funding
5 for what was known as one-shot funded staff lines in
6 our natural forest management, maintenance and
7 operations, and ranger divisions. The first time in
8 recent memory that this funding, typically provided
9 once— one fiscal year at a time, has been mayorally
10 baselined before budget adoption. The FY27 Executive
11 Plan also provides new funding for continuation of
12 our in-house tree planting program— pilot program, so
13 we can continue exploring ways to more efficiently
14 green our city and grow our tree canopy, as well as
15 an expansion of our seasonal staffing plan to support
16 increased park usage during the summer's World Cup,
17 Sail 4th 250, and Sail 4th 250 festivities. Our
18 agency's 10-year capital plan is \$12.1 billion,
19 including over \$93 million in new additional funding
20 to complete necessary repairs on park bridges around
21 the city, which will be managed by our sister agency
partners at New York City Department of
Transportation. Though I am still new in my tenure
leading this agency, I could not be prouder of the
dedicated parkies that give their all to make our

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park system the very best it can be. And I could not be more excited about this coming summer. I'll end my testimony with a short history lesson. In the summer of 1936, 90 years ago, New York City held a series of opening ceremonies for 11 new gorgeous outdoor pools funded and constructed by the WPA, or Work Progress Administration, a New Deal agency that employed millions of Americans during the depths of the Great Depression, lifting families out of poverty while delivering sorely needed public infrastructure projects to underserved neighborhoods. These 11 majestic pools are still beloved and enjoyed by local New Yorkers, but they stand also as a testament to what government can achieve when it marshals in the political will and resources to deliver for its constituents, a level of commitment that our agency strives to honor and embody every single day. We're going to be celebrating this historic anniversary in some very fun and unique ways as our outdoor pool season kicks off later this June. So please stay tuned for more details, as I hope you all can join us and enjoy some fun in the sun this summer. I want to thank the Council for its support in improving our

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3 parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers, and for
4 the opportunity to testify today. We'd now be happy
5 to answer any questions that you may have.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. Thank you,
7 Commissioner. Alright, so let's just get right into
8 things. By the way, I did- actually, I'll tell you
9 that story later. For one-shots, I, as well as I know
10 the Chair, have always hated that there were hundreds
11 of people working at the Parks Department that have
12 their jobs as one-shots, and it's very hard to plan,
13 budget, all of the things that we need to do, hiring,
14 which takes a long time in and of itself. So we know
15 there's a lot of challenges around the one-shot
16 funding. So- In terms of the city park workers and
17 rangers, I know that those were the ones that I
18 believe were not baselined. And so- oh wait, sorry,
19 those are the ones that were baselined, sorry.

20 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Those are.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEE: While the parks
enforcement patrol positions were not. And so just
wanted to get some insight if you had, you know,
insight with your conversations with OMB or the
Mayor's office as to why those were not included.

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3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, you know,
4 first and foremost, I want to just lay the groundwork
5 and say that we all understand that this was an
6 incredibly difficult budget year, that this
7 administration was really focused on delivering a
8 budget that was transparent and fair and balanced.
9 Most importantly, we knew that as an agency, we also
10 played a role in this. So I want to recognize, first
11 our team that worked directly with OMB that continues
12 to work directly with OMB every day to talk about the
13 needs of the agency, but also kind of our role in
14 overall delivering a balanced budget. Right- I also
15 want to recognize that \$15 million baselined is truly
16 something that has not happened under an Executive
17 Budget in, in anyone's actual memory here, and
18 parkies go back a ways. And so the idea that the
19 Mayor would- and this administration would step up to
20 baseline these items prior to adoption of a final
21 budget is really exciting. But certainly I think that
it was about just overall delivering on a kind of
full picture of what was allowed and what could- what
could be- happen in this budget. And we're very
excited to see- you mentioned the Rangers. This is

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3 over 50 percent of our Ranger program- was in
4 one-shot funding. To have that baselined is
5 game-changing when it comes to this division. Our
6 maintenance workers, we know how important every
7 single maintenance and operations staff member is. I
8 cannot emphasize that enough. So to have 73
9 additional staffers who are included in our ranks
10 fully, is absolutely fantastic news. And we know very
11 much the significance of the other divisions- PEP,
12 Parks Enforcement Patrol, Green Thumb, and others. So
13 that's- you know, I would argue- I can argue all day
14 that every single component of my agency is value
15 added.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEE: And then in terms of-
17 but just going back to the PEP, you know, the Parks
18 Enforcement Patrol. In the conversations you're
19 having, does it sound promising that hopefully those
20 things will get baselined, or, you know, if not, then
21 I guess we have to go through usual process.

22 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, you know, I
23 think, like- our relationship with OMB has never- has
24 arguably never been better. We're very grateful. I
25 think that we hear a lot from the administration, are

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3 in regular conversations around the significance of
4 all the divisions, particularly the ones that are
5 still one-shot funded. And so we're having regular,
6 if not daily, if not twice a day conversations at
7 this point around what are— what the these units are
8 bringing to our park system and how incredibly
9 valuable they are.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, perfect. And then
11 in terms of the previous— I know previously the
12 ranger one-shots were \$4.1 million per year, and when
13 they were baselined this year, the total cost was
14 \$5.8 for the same level of headcount. So just wanted
15 to know if you could let us know what the delta of
16 that is caused by.

17 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. I'm going
18 to probably defer to our Executive Financial Officer
19 to talk about that shift, but I believe that this is
20 really just, like, the same amount of Rangers, that
21 this is just an increase in their overall benefits—

CHAIRPERSON LEE: [interposing] Cost of
living?

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3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: and kind of lines
4 there. But go ahead, David, if you'd like to add any
5 more to that.

6 EXECUTIVE FINANCIAL OFFICER STARK: Well,
7 if I don't have to tell the truth or- okay. So- yeah,
8 so OMB added that money. There's a heavy costs
9 associated with both Rangers and PEPs for bulletproof
10 vests-

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hold on one second,
12 you have to be sworn in. Do you affirm to tell the
13 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth
14 before the committee and to respond honestly to
15 councilmember questions?

16 EXECUTIVE FINANCIAL OFFICER STARK: Yes,
17 no, I will.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Now you may go.

19 EXECUTIVE FINANCIAL OFFICER STARK: Okay.
20 Yeah, there's additional costs associated beyond the
21 cost of the individuals for bulletproof vests and
equipment that they have, and it's very heavy. So
they've actually increased that so we can cover those
costs. And it was very-

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3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: [interposing] I see.

4 Okay. So it's not just the personnel, it's also OTPS
5 as well.

6 EXECUTIVE FINANCIAL OFFICER STARK: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Got it. Perfect.

8 Thank you. And is there any budget limitation for why
9 PEP officers cannot be baselined from the best of
10 your knowledge, or is this, you know, something that
11 could be included in that? Just wanted to get
12 clarification in the baseline. So there's nothing, I
13 guess, legally, logistically, or whatever that would
14 prevent them from— okay, perfect. Okay. Now sort of
15 adjusting a little bit to tree planting. I'd like to
16 sort of— the plan included a new need of \$2.1 million
17 and 19 positions for tree planting. So would you be
18 able to break down how this money will be spent, and
19 how many tree plantings will this support?

20 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, it's a
21 great question. So to actually provide clarity here,
the positions that were funded in the Executive
Budget were for forestry management, which— oh, is
that— oh, in the in-house pilot. I'm sorry. Yeah. So
the— sorry. So, we've been running an in-house tree

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3 planting pilot for at least the last year, if not a
4 little bit longer. This was done for a number of a
5 number of reasons. We are always paying very close
6 attention to the overall kind of industry of
7 contractors, of work that's out there, the cost of
8 these contracts, kind of the ebbs and flows of the
9 tree planting industry. And we're seeing a kind of
10 overall kind of uptick year after year of kind of
11 higher costs associated with tree planting. I just-
12 under the last two years, we decided to undertake our
13 own in-house tree planting pilot program to see if we
14 could do this work ourselves in-house. It's been
15 going very well. We've focused predominantly on- in
16 Queens Village with this, which is as an- yes, this.
17 And it's been going very well. So we're very excited
18 to have again this, another year of this pilot to
19 continue to see how our running our own operation
20 in-house really impacts the overall market. Yeah,
21 would love to hear more about that. And if it's more
efficient,-

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: [interposing]

Sure.

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3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: if you're finding that
4 there's less red tape to go through.

5 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I'm actually
6 gonna ask our Assistant Commissioner Ben Osborne-

7 CHAIRPERSON LEE: [interposing] Sure.

8 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: for Forestry to
9 come up just to see, make sure I didn't say anything
10 incorrectly, but also to see if he would like to add
11 anything about how the pilot's been going since it's
12 been a year and we're very excited to see it undergo
13 another year.

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Yes, good
15 morning.

16 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: You may have to
17 swear.

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Yes, I'm
19 ready to be sworn in. Thanks.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell
21 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth
before this to respond honestly to councilmember
questions?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Yes, I
do.

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3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin.

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Okay,
5 thank you, Commissioner, and thank you, council
6 Member, for the question and the interest in our
7 in-house tree planting program. So as the
8 Commissioner noted, we began planning for this
9 in-house tree planting program during a time when we
10 were seeing contractor costs increasing, and we
11 wanted an alternative to contracted tree planting,
12 partly as a way to control costs. In the intervening
13 years while we've been working out this plan, we've
14 actually managed to stabilize and in fact reduce our
15 contracted tree planting costs, which we're very
16 proud of. But we're also really happy with the
17 initial success of this in-house tree planting
18 program. To date, this team which has consisted of 13
19 people, so far has planted over 1,800 trees in Queens
20 Village, which is a high-HVI neighborhood. With this
21 additional funding, which will— the funding is for
the headcount as well as associated OTPS. We're going
to be increasing the number of personnel on the team,
which will hopefully increase the number of trees

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3 that we plant. So, you know, we're continuing to
4 focus in Queens Village for the time being.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Nice. Yes, and the
6 Deputy Speaker and I share Queens Village, so this is
7 great news for us. And just to— so you said 13. I
8 believe the budget has 19 positions, and so you're
9 gonna increase that. Do you know what the timeline
10 for that would be?

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Well,
12 we'll begin hiring early in the fiscal year, so—

13 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Yeah. And what
14 specific titles will be supported by the funding?

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Yeah,
16 those are— they're gardeners and EPSWs primarily, as
17 well as supervision.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, perfect. And then
19 do you expect this to be one-shot or fully funded, or
20 hopefully this will be in next year's budget?

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I think we're— I
mean, we're looking at the pilot for the second year
as we do with any of our other kind of pilot programs
or programs like this where we are really very
hopeful about the outcomes. We'll continue to be in

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3 communication with OMB and the administration around
4 the results of this, and we'll happily bring you back
5 the results as well after the second year.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Perfect. And then with
7 the additional funding, because with '13 you're
8 already doing 1,800, and so how much more trees do
9 you hopefully expect to plant with the increase?

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Yeah, I
11 mean, we're hopefully gonna be planting over 1,000
12 trees every year.

13 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: And then just a
14 flag also, and forgive me, but, of course our
15 planting season, while we've had some really
16 wonderful planting years and, and frankly, like, new
17 peaks in terms of our overall planting, it's always
18 of course dependent on weather and kind of the
19 season, what the season brings us.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, perfect. And then
21 going into the savings program, and as with all other
city agencies, we know that you had to meet the
target targets that were laid out. And so Parks met
this target through a combination of additional
revenue and vacancy reductions. And the plan includes

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3 revenue of— additional revenue of \$9.2 million in
4 FY26 and \$14.6 million in FY27, and the out-years
5 from tree replacement fees. So just wanted to know,
6 how will the agency altering its fee schedule to
secure this additional revenue?

7 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, it's a
8 great question. Thank you for that. So, the— our goal
9 was very clear and was— and from the administration
10 was to look very closely at all the different
11 operations that we have under our portfolio and to
12 look at ways to never reduce services, but also to
13 look for efficiencies. And in so doing, with our
14 Chief Savings Officer, we recognized that some of the
15 tree replacement fees that we were already receiving
16 were not being actually credited as funds going into
17 the general fund, even though they should be. And so
18 we're very happy and very grateful to be working with
19 OMB to properly give us credit for the funding that
20 was already going into the general fund in order to
21 meet those marks. And so that's primarily where we're
going. We're not actually increasing any fees across
the board. This is really righting what was not being
credited to us—

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3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: [interposing] Got it.

4 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: in the overall,
5 kind of larger general fund.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. And then what is
7 the current fee for tree replacement and what will be
8 the updated cost?

9 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Just one second.
10 I'm going to look to Ben while I look this up for
11 you, just in case, Ben, you have it faster. So to re-

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Yeah, I
13 can jump in here, Commissioner. Yep.

14 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Okay. Sorry,
15 thank you. Go ahead.

16 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Yeah, so
17 the average citywide tree replacement fee right now
18 is \$2,900, and, you know, as I noted earlier, that's
19 a reduction pro- from previous costs. It's actually
20 18 percent lower than it was in 20- fiscal year '22.
21 We don't know what the FY27 fee will be as of yet
because it- each fiscal year the fee is based on our
contracted costs from the prior fiscal year. So we
calculate that after the end of this fiscal year.

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3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Okay, and when in
4 the fiscal year usually does that take place for the
5 following?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: So we-

7 CHAIRPERSON LEE: [interposing] In terms
8 of-

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: You know,
10 we have to finish up our contracts, you know, in
11 July.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Right.

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: And then
14 it, you know, takes us a couple of months to, you
15 know, make sure all those numbers are accurate and
16 update the fees. So, late summer, early fall.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. And then can you
18 break down the cost of the tree replacements in terms
19 of PS costs, contract costs, cost of actual tree?

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE:

21 [inaudible]

EXECUTIVE FINANCIAL OFFICER STARK: So
when the payments are made, I don't know that it's
broken down in quite that way. Obviously, you know,
when the planting funds are, you know, delivered to

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3 Parks to go ahead and provide those added, you know,
4 then obviously, you know, staff is used in whatever
5 way is deemed necessary. So I don't think the
6 payments that are made for replacement are subdivided
or broken down in quite that way.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yeah, no, I was just
8 wondering if you guys calculated it that way, because
9 obviously there's the cost, right, the fee itself,
10 but then in that fee is usually like a lot of other
11 things that go into it, like the, the cost of the
12 labor and other things like that. So I just wanted to
13 know if you had a breakdown of that.

14 EXECUTIVE FINANCIAL OFFICER STARK: I
15 don't have it here currently, but that is something
16 we can follow up with.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, perfect. And then
18 last question is about the vacancy reduction. It's
19 for 40 positions with savings of \$9.2 million in
20 FY26, and then \$27.6 million in FY '27 and the out
21 years. Um, so it was, you know, disheartening to see
these vacancy reductions after years of the council
fighting against the previous administration's cuts
and vacancy reductions at the Parks Department. We

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3 had hoped for, you know, the one percent, as the
4 Chair mentioned, you know, one percent of the budget
5 to the Parks Department. But this is definitely
6 something that the council included on our side in
7 the preliminary response. And so, has the department
8 decided which specific positions will be reduced? And
9 if so, can you please provide that information?

10 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. You know, I
11 wanna thank again the Council for their continued
12 advocacy for, of course, increasing our budget. We,
13 as the head of an agency, we love talking about
14 bigger budgets and bigger capacity. The truth is, is
15 with these vacancies, we've been under, as you know,
16 the two-for-one hiring freeze for a while. And we
17 see- we've been talking about vacancies for far
18 before this administration. And so the vacancies that
19 we had there were not able to be filled. So we've-
20 it's- you know, we've worked very closely with OMB to
21 have a lot of close conversations about vacancies
that are- that we've long had empty versus new ones
that are coming up every month and have come up with
essentially a plan to move forward with the ability
to fill our positions as they become vacant again.

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3 We're very excited about getting rid of the
4 two-for-one piece and really what you're- what,
5 constituents, what our city is feeling right now in
6 terms of our Parks Department, they're not going to
7 really feel any sort of difference in those vacancies
8 because they've been gone for so- they've been gone
9 for quite some time.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEE: And since FY21, I don't
11 know if you have the data for this, but since FY21,
12 how many positions have been reduced as part of the
13 PEGs savings plans, and what level of savings were
14 achieved by the reductions?

15 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I'm sorry, I
16 don't think I have that information available, but
17 I'm happy to-

18 CHAIRPERSON LEE: [interposing] Okay, if
19 you can get back to us.

20 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: to follow up with
21 you all.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. And what is the
23 current budgeted and actual headcount for FY26 and
24 '27? And if you could break down the numbers by
25 full-time and part-time, that'd be great.

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3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. So while I
4 flip over to this- our agency full-time budgeted
5 positions for FY27 is 5,141. I do have a historical
6 perspective on that for you as well, but that is
7 significantly up. And then in terms of part-time
8 seasonal positions- oh, sorry, we have around 3,000-
9 yes, full-time equivalent positions, but that results
10 in around roughly 5,000 additional employees, 5,034.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Got it. So 3,000 FTE
12 which equals 5,000.

13 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Perfect. Okay. I
15 have a lot of other questions on trees and everything
16 else, but you know what, I am going to pass it off to
17 our Chair Hankerson.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Chair.
19 Just a few questions. Just going back to the
20 one-shots. Can you please provide a breakdown of the
21 remaining one-shots that were not included in the
Executive Plan along with their funding amounts in
FY26 and any supported headcount?

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. So, of the
remaining one-shots that are still up for question,

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3 we have- there are three real buckets. There's our
4 Parks Enforcement Patrol, our Green Thumb program,
5 and stump removal funds, which we're very grateful
6 for. I'll take them in backwards order. So for stump
7 removal, it's approximately \$2 million of stump
8 removal. This is has not yet been baselined. It also
9 complements \$1.4 million- or last year it
10 complemented \$1.4 million of mayoral baseline funding
11 in FY26, \$3.4 million total. The number of stumps
12 that comes out to kind of depends year-to-year based
13 on the type of stump and removal kind of period. But
14 it's roughly between 4,000 to 5,500 removals per
15 year. In addition to that, our Green Thumb program,
16 the one-shot funding was in FY26 \$2.6 million. That
17 results- that really equates to 15 positions with
18 additional funding for OTPS. Our Green Thumb program
19 is around- is 32 baseline year-round lines. And so
20 these 15 additional positions do represent a
21 significant portion of our workforce there. And I'm
happy to talk more about the Green Thumb program and
what that does. The one-shot fund- the OTPS funding
for this program also goes to tree pruning and

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removal- tree removals within the Green Thumb
3 community gardens.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I appreciate that.
5 Let's just say-

6 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: [interposing]
7 Would you like me to talk about the PEP?

8 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: No, not yet.

9 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Okay.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Let's just say PEP
11 or Green Thumb, you know, don't receive funding in
12 the adopted budget. What will Parks do with those
13 employees who will no longer have jobs? Will they be
14 given jobs elsewhere in the agency or the city? Will
15 they receive severance checks? What's the plan?

16 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, we would
17 typically in that case, which we hope is not the
18 case, we would typically work with each of these
19 individuals to see if they would be eligible to be
20 moved into other open lines or any grant-funded
21 lines. We have unfortunately seen this happen in the
past where programs or portions of our departments
are not funded in another year. And so we work very
hard to try to ensure that as many of our staff that

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3 can be accommodated in other portions of our agency
4 can do so. It's of course though based on
5 availability of open lines and positions.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: So if there are no
7 open lines or positions, what happens to them?

8 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Then their lines
9 are only funded until the end of the fiscal year.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: They would be
11 without a job?

12 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Just to be clear.
14 Okay. Will all baseline positions be filled by those
15 who are currently employed in those roles, or will
16 they be open to the public to be filled?

17 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I'm sorry, can
18 you repeat that question one more time?

19 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: So, will all
20 baseline positions be filled by those who are
21 currently employed, or are you opening it up to the
public to apply?

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sorry. Yes, yes,
by and large, unless there's some, like, disciplinary
infraction that is pending, which I don't know of any

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3 right now. Yes, all the positions would be filled by
4 those who have them now.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Will Parks
6 continue to push for expanded positions in those
7 areas, or do you feel that you have the adequate
8 amount with the current numbers?

9 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure, as I've
10 said before, more is always more. In leading our
11 agency, we are very thrilled to have the positions
12 that we have. We're really excited about these \$15
13 million of baseline positions. Again, historic and
14 very, very promising and a real indication of our
15 value within the city. But of course, we'd always
16 welcome more resources whenever available.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: The plan included
18 an additional \$7.9 million beginning in FY27 for
19 recreation staff. Which centers will those— will
20 these staff be stationed at? Can you provide a
21 breakdown by title?

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. We are
happy to give you a breakdown of title, but at a
later date for a couple reasons. The plan is— the
plan is funding three different recreation centers:

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3 Owen Dolen, St. Mary's, and Mary Cali Dalton. Mary
4 Cali Dalton is still being built, so we won't be
5 actually hiring until closer to when it's opening up.
6 And St. Mary's and Owen Dolen, same thing. We'd be
7 hiring a little bit closer to when these are opening
8 up. They're all opening up very soon this year, which
9 we're really excited about. There are a number of
10 lines when it comes to management- recreation
11 centers. We have center managers, deputy center
12 managers, CPWs, recreation associates, PEP officers,
13 lifeguards, sometimes IT folks who are there. So
14 there's a number of different titles that we have,
15 sometimes resident engineers, depending for new
16 buildings, like Shirley Chisholm and others. So we're
17 happy to give you that information as it becomes
18 available. We'll be making those decisions closer to
19 when we're hiring so that we can really see how,
20 particularly for those two rec centers that are
21 reopening, how that balances out with our existing
staff.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Is it the practice
of Parks to hire from the local community that the
rec center is in or being built in?

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3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I mean, we'd
4 certainly try to as much possible. I think that we
5 have— I'm very proud of my agency's relationship and
6 how we engage with local communities. I think it's
7 really important. I think that we should be
8 continuing to not just rest on our laurels, but push
9 ourselves further and harder to make sure that we are
10 truly community-based entities and an agency that's
11 rooted in the communities that we are very proud and
12 privileged to serve in. So, certainly with Shirley
13 Chisholm, which is my first big recreation center
14 opening, our first big one in the last 10 years.
15 We're very proud to be working hand in hand with the
16 community. I think our center manager is actually
17 from East Flatbush, if I recall correctly. Not that
18 that's always a mandatory piece, but we're always
19 looking for opportunities to engage more local New
20 Yorkers.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: We're also excited
about the center that's coming to our Deputy
Speaker's District very soon as well.

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes.

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3 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: So looking forward
4 to that.

5 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Groundbreaking
6 this year.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: This year? She
8 said it, not me. Are there any additional part-time
9 staff that will be hired along with the staff that
10 are currently at the centers?

11 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: No, what we have
12 presented to us in the— in this year's executive
13 budget is what we'll be hiring for.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: How long does the
15 agency believe it will take to fully hire these
16 positions?

17 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I don't think it
18 takes very long. We— this is something that we are
19 very good at doing. We will start, I believe as soon
20 as the new fiscal year begins, as we get closer to
21 these openings.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Just to jump over
to capital projects, Parks has one of the largest
capital budgets of any department, \$3.9 billion
between FY26 and 2030. Yet it consistently has long

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3 project timelines and issues with delays, to which I
4 know all my colleagues can probably speak to. I've
5 seen this firsthand in my district with police at-
6 Police Officer Edward Byrne Park, to which comfort
7 stations were funded by my predecessor's predecessor,
8 and construction is finally starting next month.
9 Sorry, July. What is the current budgeted and actual
10 headcount for the Capital Projects Division?

11 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. So our
12 budgeted headcount for capital is approximately 400-
13 I'm just looking this up to make sure- 450 staffers.
14 Sorry, I'm- and then I think that our actual
15 headcount is 390 with 60 vacancies.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: 390 with 60
17 vacancies? Are there any issues with hiring capital
18 analysts, engineers, project managers, or architects?

19 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: You know, I
20 wouldn't say issues, but there are certainly unique
21 challenges of hiring for these- of hiring for these
specific positions. Most importantly, that we are
competing with the private industry when it comes to
these roles. They are highly specialized and
oftentimes even competing with other agencies for the

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3 same type of- for very simple similar and- positions.
4 I'd say that we're looking very closely at this. I
5 would like to see this division completely staffed,
6 staffed up and looking very closely at how, to your
7 first point, we can shave down the time of these
8 capital projects. I completely agree with you. I
9 think that our capital timeline- I understand the
10 length of time, but I also think it is far too long.
11 And so however we can work together, and we are
12 talking to our sister agencies on this because a lot
13 of it does come back to regulatory responsibilities
14 that we have in meeting other rules pieces of laws.
15 We're going to look very collaboratively at how we
16 shave this timeline down.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Sure. Is there
18 anything that you could suggest since, you know,
19 we're here and I believe most members, if not all of
20 them on this dais, have the same issues when it comes
21 to timeline with capital projects. Is there anything
the council can do? Do you have any suggestions for
us?

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, I really
appreciate the question. You know, I think that what-

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3 there are a few things. One is that we really should
4 and would love to have an ongoing conversation with
5 you about pieces of legislation that could be moved
6 along. There are pieces of legislation in past
7 administrations, past members of the Council who have
8 talked about various kind of efforts that could
9 potentially shorten this timeline down. Without
10 getting in- too into the weeds, something like
11 suggesting that a vendor gets registered with MOCS
12 once as a vendor, but not necessarily specifically
13 for every project could maybe close-, could shorten
14 timelines for registration or things like that. We're
15 working with our sister agency, DEP, as well as OTI
16 right now under my leadership with Commissioner
17 Garcia and others to look at the SWIP process, which
18 we know has significantly added to our timeframe,
19 both in time but also in cost, looking at ways that
20 we can shorten down that, be it through rule changes
21 or just through maybe even having staffing from
different agencies sit within our own agencies so
that we can streamline these processes. We'll happily
report to you more on that. I'd also say that a lot
of times we see our projects expand in timeline

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3 because we see a lot of kind of scope creep in these
4 things. We see a lot of times scope kind of expanding
5 projects. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but it
6 does complicate the overall procurement design
7 processes and other things like that. And in large
8 part, I'd say that's a good thing because we also-
9 it's because we are rooted in community input. We
10 start every capital project with community input. I
11 think we're the only agency that does so. And that
12 also means that because we have- many times where
13 we're going back to the community, we are adjusting
14 our design designs every time, and that also can just
15 add to the timeline. One ask I would say is that just
16 working in close collaboration with your borough
17 commissioners and with our capital team would be very
18 helpful because we can help in collaboration together
19 direct, like, you on projects that we know are just
20 over the- just there to get fully funded, or that
21 have, like, some other ways that we can group these
projects together to kind of move the needle forward
kind of faster. So I'd say close working
relationships, which we're very grateful for already
with our council members and the capital team, is a

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3 big piece. Happy to talk to you more about other
4 pieces of legislation, and then we'll be continuing
5 to come back to you to discuss ways that we are
6 specifically trying to shorten the SWIP process.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. I do
8 want to acknowledge we've been joined by Council
9 Members Nurse, Hudson, P. Sanchez, Wong, and on Zoom
10 we have Council Members Ung and Brooks-Powers. I just
11 have a couple more questions. I'm going to turn over
12 to my colleagues, and then I'll circle back again
13 with some more questions. The admin has gone back to
14 the baseline. The admin has not baselined 100 PEP
15 officers who are on expiring contracts. Roughly what
16 percentage of the total PEP do these 100 positions
17 represent? Would you say these positions are critical
18 to the agency?

19 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes, absolutely.
20 Our PEP officers, as anyone who is in our parks know,
21 are absolutely critical components to our agency.
They are peace officers first and foremost, but they
also have an extraordinarily difficult job that they
do very well every day. They are there to essentially
enforce our rules. And it's never fun to go up to a

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3 stranger and tell them that they're not following a
4 rule or that they need to do something differently.
5 But that's what our officers do. They also educate
6 the public on all things around our parks and making
7 the spaces welcoming for everyone. They represent the
8 100 officers that are— that were in one-shot funding
9 represent a strong component of our overall number we
10 have 350— roughly 354 officer lines and this is
11 including those 100 officers.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Do they specialize
13 in conflict resolution?

14 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Absolutely, yes.
15 So we train— they go through rigorous training for, I
16 believe it's 16 weeks, and much of that is in
17 conflict resolution.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Would you say that
19 without them, we may see an increase in crime in
20 parks?

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I'd say that PEP
Officers are one of our best tools to enforce rules,
can keep people safe and engaged in our parks in
appropriate ways.

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3 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. The
4 admin has not baselined 15 positions for Green Thumb.
5 What do these particular roles do, and how many
6 community gardens does Green Thumb serve?

7 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I believe, and I
8 will double-check, our Green Thumb program has around
9 500 gardens in our entire portfolio, although I can
10 get that number confirmed for you. Our- as I
11 mentioned before, the 15 green staff lines represent
12 again a significant number of our overall unit of-
13 they are 15 and then plus another 32, so 47 total.
14 Our Green Thumb program is incredibly important and a
15 very, like, a very just culturally significant
16 program because they allow for everyday New Yorkers
17 to have a very different type of relationship with
18 the land and with our park system. It's through our
19 Green Fund program that families that New York
20 residents are able to cultivate the land. They are
21 able to create spaces for their communities that
celebrate community- the differences in our
communities, that celebrate the diversity of our
communities, and have been oftentimes created when it
feels like the surrounding neighborhood was just in

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3 so many ways falling apart, and it's these gardens
4 that have turned communities around. They've really
5 kind of become pillars in every neighborhood that
6 they are in. So they are significant. They provide
7 tremendous benefit way beyond- they punch before-
8 above their weight, I would say, in terms of what
9 they bring back to their communities. And every
10 single one of those staff members is incredibly vital
11 to our agency.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I just have two
13 more questions and then I'll circle back. Where would
14 you, Commissioner, like to see additional positions
15 if additional one-shots were funded by this Council?

16 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you for the
17 question. I- as the leader of this agency, I don't
18 necessarily like choosing between my children, so I
19 will defer on that, but I'd say that there's not one
20 corner of my agency that is not being used to its
21 full capacity. We provide incredibly wide range of
programs and services. It's a very- you've heard me
in my testimony talk about 30,000 acres of parkland,
14 miles of beaches, and reading up about this, we
have 160 miles of coastline in our city that we

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3 actually are taking care of in our wetlands, our 160
4 acres- sorry, not miles, 160 acres of coastlines that
5 we're caring for in terms of our natural areas as
6 well. There's not one division of my agency that's
7 not absolutely serving New York and delivering on a
8 very full, rich, and diverse public realm. So I, of
9 course, would welcome additional resources in any
10 component of that. I'm, you know, happy to talk about
11 specifically these one-shot positions or the other
12 historical positions that were one-shot previously
13 and now baselined. But every department I'm
14 extraordinarily proud of and can make a very strong
15 argument that they are absolutely essential to our
16 agency.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. My
18 final question. The Mayor campaigned on a promise to
19 get parks to one percent. What is the plan? Yeah.

20 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Well, happy- I,
21 you know, I certainly was very enthusiastic, very
excited to hear that same- that same promise of the
one percent. I think that what I'd say is that we are
in constant communication with the Mayor truly, even
as earlier today and every day we are talking about

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3 what it looks like to expand parks budget. We were
4 talking about what the real felt experience of what
5 that looks like on the ground. I'm extremely grateful
6 for our advocates and partners in this because we are
7 in regular communication about not only what one
8 percent means, but what it means to expand staffing
9 across the board and what that will feel like when
10 we're able to achieve that. In the meantime, I'd say
11 that our plan is always the same, to deliver high-
12 the highest quality public realm possible to all New
13 Yorkers, regardless of who they are, with the
14 resources that we're given.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Do you think we'll
16 get there?

17 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I hope— I, yeah.
18 Yes, I do.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay. Thank you,
20 Commissioner. I'm going to turn it over to our
21 colleagues.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. So also want to
23 recognize we have been joined by Majority Leader
24 Abreu, as well as Council Member Krishnan. And we

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3 will start with our Deputy Speaker, followed by
4 Council Member Brewer.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Hello. I just
6 had a few questions. I'm going to be a little bit all
7 over the place, but the permit division- can you
8 share how many people work in the citywide permit
9 division?

10 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I'm not sure.
11 One- if you don't mind, one moment. I may ask our
12 Assistant Commissioner David Cerron to join us to
13 give the specifics on our permit division. But while
14 he's coming up, I'd say that our permit division is
15 divided kind of in twofold. We have our borough
16 permit offices, which handle everything from your
17 average birthday party to, I'd say, kind of more
18 run-of-the-mill events. When it comes to specialized,
19 kind of citywide or specialized permitting, be it
20 large-scale events or permitting that has special
21 elements to it, commercial elements to it, or
otherwise just big events, that goes to our citywide
permitting office, which I think is probably what
you're asking about.

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3 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: I'm 100 percent
4 talking about citywide.

5 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Okay, so I'll
6 turn to David Cerron then to—

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Borough permits
8 office is not the problem.

9 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Great.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: As you know.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good afternoon. Do you
12 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
13 nothing but the truth before this committee and to
14 respond honestly to council member questions?

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER CERRON: I do.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin.

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER CERRON: It's nine,
18 council member. Thank you for the question.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: And how many
20 permit requests get funneled to the citywide division
21 every year?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER CERRON: They're
processing approximately 1,000.

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3 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Do you think
4 that is an adequate amount of staff to process 1,000
5 permit requests every year?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER CERRON: We're
7 happy to work with the resources that we have. Of
8 course, it's always helpful to have more resources,
9 like, you know, every city agency, but we're going to
10 continue to do the best with the team that we have.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. A question
12 about the PEP officers in Roy Wilkins. So I know when
13 my predecessor fought really hard to, like, baseline
14 about \$1 million to Roy Wilkins, the PEP officers
15 were specifically for Roy Wilkins, but as I
16 understand it, the PEP officers are moving around
17 multiple parks in Southeast Queens. And as you know,
18 we had the tragedy a month or so ago. And I love my
19 Queens Borough Commissioner, and I understand the
20 thinking around having the PEP officers move around,
21 considering there may not be a lot of activity in one
particular park, but considering that Roy Wilkins
specifically has a very large volume of young people
that go after school in the summer, I just wanted to
know if the Parks Department was thinking about

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3 increasing the number of PEP officers in Southeast
4 Queens so that they don't have to rotate? Obviously,
5 prior to my predecessor, I don't think there were any
6 PEP officers in our area. So I just wanted to
7 understand the thinking around that, how many PEP
8 officers are assigned to Roy Wilkins?

9 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. So thank
10 you for the question. So certainly we can look at
11 this. We, of course, we're— we have our 350-ish, 354
12 officers for the entire city. When it comes to— we
13 try to cover as much ground as humanly possible when
14 it comes to that specific funding. Happy to look into
15 this and, and to see. We know how important Roy
16 Wilkins is. We know how heavily used it is throughout
17 really every season, but particularly during the
18 summertime. So happy to look at that. And in terms of
19 overall staffing numbers, we are constantly trying to
20 take a data-driven approach as much as possible
21 towards deploying our staff, trying to cover our
hotspots, our spots where we know a lot of people are
going. We also, of course, during the summertime are
extending our PEP officers also then to beaches and

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3 pools as well. So we just cut- try to cover as much
4 ground as we can, but we'll certainly-

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: [interposing]
6 Yeah, and in Southeast Queens, we're always one big
7 happy family. And so for me, it's fine to have the
8 PEP officers rotate between Council Member
9 Hankerson's district and mine. But what I don't want
10 to see is that the resources that were technically
11 supposed to be for one particular park get stretched
12 thin, versus your department deciding to just invest
13 a little bit more in Southeast Queens. Like, that
14 money was for Roy Wilkins and for the PEP officers in
15 Roy Wilkins, which again, I think it's fine for us to
16 share, especially if the activity is not as much in
17 certain parks, but I just want you all to review that
18 and not, like, continue to use the PEP officers that
19 technically were not for other parks.

20 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: I have just one
more question, and then I guess I'll come back for
round two, Chair. Okay, so the other question I have
is I know I spoke to you- I can't remember the name
of the title of the rec staff that technically

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technically- which I didn't even know this existed,
3 but that does the pickup play games in the park?

4 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Playground
5 Associates.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Playground
7 Associates, yes. Can you just share how many
8 Playground Associates exist across the city? Because
9 I've never heard of that position. I don't think
10 there's any Playground Associates in Southeast
11 Queens, but prove me wrong. But yeah, I just- I think
12 that is a low-key equity issue, because I don't
13 think-

14 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I would love to
15 know where the Playground Associates are and if they
16 are, like, equally distributed across New York City.

17 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. I'm going
18 to look to our Deputy Commissioner Margaret Nelson to
19 give us a little more information, but while she's
20 coming up, I'm happy to talk a little bit more. So,
21 the program that I think you're referring to is our
Playground Associate Program. It's the same group of
people who are also helping staff our summer camp
program, but we have- I think last summer we had 73

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3 playground associates that we put- you'll see them in
4 yellow shirts, they should be wearing yellow shirts,
5 and they are stationed throughout parks throughout
6 the city. And we will definitely get you a list of
7 where they are located. I don't know if we've
8 actually come up with- oh, we did come up with a list
9 of locations- oh, by borough. We can give you that
10 list by borough, but we can also give you a list by
11 park after this.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yes, I would
13 look-

14 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: We have 23-

15 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: [interposing]
16 How many parks do we have?

17 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Of course we have
18 we have thousands.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yes, and we
20 only have 73 playground associates.

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, so we do
them strategically. We pick the locations where, of
course, there's a public restroom building, of
course, where there's some sort of, like, water play,
and then we- where we know that we're able to reach

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3 as many kids as possible. It's an incredible program,
4 and I'm grateful for your question because it gives
me an opportunity to talk about it in more detail.

5 But we know that oftentimes, and I was one of those
6 kids, where you work dur- your mom- your parents work
7 during the summertime and you just have no place to
8 go. So you either hang out at home in the apartment
9 or you go out in the parks by yourself. And we know
10 that for many kids, parents, myself included, it's a
11 terrifying idea to have your kids go out there
12 without any sort of adult presence. Our Playground
13 Associates create that adult presence. They are there
14 to engage kids in any sort of activity. They're there
15 to make sure that they're drinking water, that
16 they're cooling down. It's board games, it's
17 basketball, it's playing on the- it's playing- doing-
18 kicking a ball around on a soccer field. It's all of
19 these things and more. They're out there keeping an
20 eye out and looking for kids. And I'm sure Margaret
21 can give you some of the numbers, but when it comes
to how many kids we're actually reading, the number-
while it is a small program of 73 playground
associates, we're reaching thousands, if not tens of

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3 thousands of kids every summer, and it's tremendous.
4 I want more families to know about this program. I'm
5 really enthusiastic about it. It is a tough job to be
6 out there all day just looking out for kids, but
7 that's what we do. It is meant to complement the- a
8 number of other very affordable opportunities that we
9 provide to New Yorkers. I believe that this is like a
10 network of services that is absolutely our job to
11 provide, and I'm very proud of what this program
12 brings. Margaret can give you some of the more
13 specific numbers.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good afternoon. Do you
15 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
16 nothing but the truth before the committee, and to
17 respond honestly to committee questions?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: I do.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Thank you. I
21 think you summarized it, you know, amazingly, but
just to give you some of the numbers, we do have 73
sites currently, and that's pretty much been our
historic average for the past couple years. We have
13 sites in the Bronx, 14 in Brooklyn, 23 in Queens,

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3 13 in Manhattan, and 10 in Staten Island. And I don't
4 have the list of the exact parks, but we can get that
5 to you, in terms of especially Southeast Queens. And
6 then in 2025 we served over 440,000 participants
7 during the summer. And that is a big increase from
8 2024 where we served approximately 300,000. And I
9 would also just like to add, in addition to what our
10 commissioner said, you know, these are seasonal
11 positions. So we are recruiting people with some
12 experience working with kids, and they are out in
13 those playgrounds every day working with these kids.
14 And if you can do that job, we're like, you should be
15 in recreation. And so it is a good pipeline for us
16 too, to hire folks from the community, work with our
17 kids students in the summer, and then when we have
18 positions available, kind of bring them into our
19 full-time workforce.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you, and I
21 appreciate all the details, and I would love to just
see it expanded, because I agree that it's a good
program and nobody knows that it exists.

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3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Alright, thank you. And
4 we have you down for round two. Council Member Brewer
5 followed by Council Member Narcisse.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
7 much, and congratulations, Commissioner, on your hard
8 work. I am aware of your hard work and it's showing.
9 Thank you. On the PEP officers, what- I know you have
10 354, 100 hopefully will get included in that- there
11 are included. How many do you really need?

12 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I mean, right now
13 our PEP officers are- thank you for the question and
14 thank you for your comments. Right now our PEP
15 officers are predominantly running on, as the Deputy
16 Speaker mentioned, really trying to cover as much
17 ground as we possibly can. There are situations where
18 we have them be stationary in parks, but we're trying
19 to cover as much ground as possible. I'd say again,
20 we'd welcome as many resources as possible. We know
21 the benefit of PEP officers here. It would be lovely
to see as many- we'd see- we'd love a presence in
the-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] Even
Central Park needs them. They have their own ranger

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3 corps, but between the e-bikes and the \$42 million
4 people and other parks similarly, you need more PEP
5 officers. So at some point, I think you should tell
6 us how many you need, and then we should be
7 advocating for that. Just a suggestion. Number two,
8 trees. You know, I hate your program. Yes. So my
9 question is, how much— because we're never going to
10 get another freaking tree in Manhattan. So my
question is, how much does it cost? Maybe you
answered this.

11 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I didn't hear an
13 answer. Per tree, if you're— I know if it costs you
14 in-house, \$2,900. I got that. But I have— I can't use
15 you. So what's— where else can I— where do I go? Do I
16 go to New York Trees? Do I get— do I— can somebody
just put a tree in the the pot, in the pit? How do I
get more? How does that work?

17 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you
18 for— we did answer your question, but we're happy to
19 talk about this, and thank you. I—

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]
21 Well, you didn't say how else I can get a tree.

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3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: So you can- there
4 are a couple ways. So constituents or anybody,
5 yourself included can plant- purchase their own tree,
6 and they could work with us. We can help give
7 directions on the type of tree to plant, any sort of
8 planting guidelines. We do like to advise on types of
9 trees that are-

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I
11 understand that.

12 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: you know, here
13 and complementary to the trees that we have. They can
14 also go to Tree Time, which is our partner in this, a
15 and that kind of fast-tracks also trees being put in
16 plant- in tree beds, and then, I'd say that those are
17 the two primary ways. I'd also say though that in
18 terms of the work that we're doing, of course, I
19 would remind you that it's not just about planting
20 trees, but it's also removing stumps, and then
21 covering up tree pits that are no longer viable
trees.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know. I just
want more trees. They're dying like crazy. And so I
guess what you're- I mean, I'm still trying to get

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3 rid of your program and find another program, a
4 complementary program, something. I have the same
5 question. You need X number of PEP officers, but how
6 much do you need to actually have a real tree
7 planting program that would plant 1,800 in every
8 neighborhood or whatever is needed?

9 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you.
10 I mean, I think our forestry- in terms of our street
11 trees that we have and that we care for, and
12 including also the landscaped parks are around
13 880,000 trees. So it's a tremendous amount of trees
14 that we're caring for, and are- we're able to care
15 for that many trees through a combination of
16 contracted work and in our in-house unit.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And
18 lifeguards- now, I don't want- are they out of
19 Chelsea? I mean, out of 60th Street Rec Center? And
20 how- thanks to Iris, lifeguards are increasing.

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I give her full
credit. So my question is, do you have enough for the
summer? Can you move them out? Are they moved out of-
what's the name of that stupid thing that Adrienne-

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3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: [interposing]
4 [inaudible] Gertrude [sic].

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah, I hate that
6 name. That was Adrienne's idea. The 60th Street Rec
Center. Are they out of there?

7 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: No, we're still-
8 we're- so our lifeguard- so thank you. We are still
9 certifying, recertifying, and recertifying our
10 lifeguards. I'll turn to our First Deputy
11 Commissioner to give us more information about this.
12 We'll be continuing to do this and get them all
13 trained and get them out into our beaches and pools.
14 Up through the Fourth of July is where we'll hit-
15 we'll hit our peak. We right now are looking very
16 good at our numbers. We're higher this year at this
17 point in time than we were last year. We'll be very
18 excited to share with you the final numbers on the
19 Fourth of July. But I'll let our First Deputy
20 Commissioner talk about specifically the use. We are-
21 we're training and recertifying our lifeguards at a
number of our facilities. And I know Gertrude at the
60th Street Recreation Center Center is one of them.

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3 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah, we want them
4 out of there. Go ahead, sir.

5 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you, Commissioner,
6 Council Member. We are training and certifying
7 lifeguards in all five boroughs. In Manhattan, we're
8 in Chelsea and 60th Street, Gertrude Ederle [sp?]. We
9 conclude training and certification right around July
10 1st into the 4th, right around there. And then after
11 that, we'll be done with the training and
12 certification.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Then we can get
14 the teen room back for the rest of the year?

15 UNIDENTIFIED: Until we start training
16 again in the fall.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, but I need
18 that teen room back, because it's right next to NYCHA
19 and nobody can swim there. It doesn't- it needs to
20 have a lot of NYCHA residents swimming there. And to
21 be honest with you, the lifeguards are preventing
that. So I- further discussion. I've been asking
about it for about 10 years.

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure.

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3 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And then just
4 finally, the other quick question is- maybe you did
5 this already, but how many- I have the number of
6 5,000 seasonal workers. But again, it's still- they
7 start when? Because it takes a while, I think, to get
8 them on board, right? Or do the seasonal workers
9 start exactly when they're needed? That seems to be a
10 problem in Riverside Park. And then finally, the
11 bathrooms. How are we going to fund some of these
12 bathrooms?

13 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you. So,
14 let me take the bathroom piece, and then I'll turn to
15 our First Deputy Commissioner to talk to you about
16 the seasonal hiring piece. So certainly our, you
17 know, as I've said before, our capital I definitely
18 understand and hear the concerns around the timeline
19 for our bathroom projects as well as the cost. As
20 particularly in your district, but in many districts
21 across the board, we see that these are not just
bathrooms, they're bathroom plus or bathroom plus
plus. They're historic landmark bathrooms with staff
spaces associated with them, many of them embedded
into hillsides. All of this actually adds tremendous

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3 amount of cost. Now, we certainly can't- we're not
4 making up the numbers in terms of the market in terms
5 of the overall cost, but where we do have some
6 control and where I believe that we should be
7 focusing is on the timeline of these projects. I
8 really want to see this timeline shaved down. I want
9 to work collaboratively with our other agencies to
10 try to shut- shave down some of these processes,
11 reduce inefficiencies and deliver capital projects
12 faster. When it comes to the overall cost, I think
13 we're all hands on deck and thinking through ways in
14 order to do this. Certainly we have tremendous
15 partners, and I know that you have some infamous ones
16 in Riverside Park.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah, \$13
18 million.

19 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: And so we're
20 working very closely with our partners to think
21 through ways that we can- that we- so that we can
22 deliver bathrooms faster and hopefully for less
23 money. It's an ongoing conversation, but I definitely
24 hear it. And then for the hiring, I'd actually say
25 that we are one of the agencies that hires the

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3 largest kind of seasonal component plan in the city.
4 And so we've become very good at this. We have become
5 very nimble when it comes to the seasonal hiring, and
6 have been working very-- we haven't had any hiccups.
7 But I'll let our First Deputy--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I've
9 heard differently. That's what I'm asking. So go
10 ahead. I've heard it takes about, you know, takes a
11 while to get them hired, and therefore the season
12 kind of moves along. But go ahead.

13 EXECUTIVE FINANCIAL OFFICER STARK: Thank
14 you, Councilmember. No, we have no issues with-- no
15 constraints with hiring. We're very efficient at it.
16 As the commissioner said, we have three tranches. We
17 hire in mid-April for spring startup in ball field,
18 May 1st for beaches, and June 1st for pools. So the
19 last of those three tranches will be coming on within
20 the next week, because again, we open pools in the
21 end of June. So each of the tranches comes on about a
month before their work is needed.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: How about the--
23 what I call horticulturalist or season people in the
24 parks? Not--

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3 EXECUTIVE FINANCIAL OFFICER STARK: That
4 would be April 15th.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: April- so they-
6 and they start for the whole summer, and they're
7 already on April 15th?

8 EXECUTIVE FINANCIAL OFFICER STARK: Yep,
9 six-month lines that begin April 15th.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, thank
11 you.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, great. So we've
13 been joined by Council Member Won as well. So we have
14 Council Member Narcisse followed by Council Member
15 Won.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you,
17 Commissioner, and thank you for the leadership and
18 everyone that's here. But it seemed like the question
19 I was going to ask about the staffing again- do we
20 have enough staff? I know you came with your dream,
21 and so is the leadership here. So do we have enough
staff, or do we need funding to make sure that all
the things that we asking- because I'm going to ask
too what we need in our district and New York City at
large. Do we have enough funding to cover? You feel

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3 like we're going to be— you're going to be able to
4 run the parks safely with, you know, efficiency and
5 everything?

6 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you for
7 your question. I will again say that I'm extremely
8 proud of the work that we're doing with the staff and
9 resources that we've provided. I, of course, would
10 always welcome more resources and more staffing.
11 However, we also understand the mandate that we have
12 and the responsibility that we have to deliver a
13 safe, welcoming, open park system that is well cared
14 for. And we'll continue to work on doing that with
15 the resources that we have.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: You know, we
17 love parks, right? So, in 2024, in our adopted budget
18 that we had, right, the plan was— we had \$800,000 for
19 a pilot program to provide menstrual products in the
20 parks bathroom. Can you please give me an update on
21 that?

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. I'll turn
to our First Deputy Commissioner. Do you have any—

UNIDENTIFIED: Yeah, my recollection is
that I believe, in a series of PEGs, that might have

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3 been- I can't remember the exact plan, but my
4 recollection is that the funding for that pilot was
5 withdrawn before the pilot started.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Oh, okay. So
7 we're not going have menstrual products in our
8 bathroom the way that we expected.

9 UNIDENTIFIED: It is not a standard
amenity.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay. Moving
11 forward, we talk about pools in the city of New York.
12 You know that a lot of areas we don't have any pools,
13 including mine. One of the goal- because we talk
14 about Shirley Chisholm a lot, and which I spoke to
15 the commissioner. To me, rec center is just like a
16 preventive approach when it comes to so many problems
17 we're dealing with in New York City with our youth.
18 So, in term of planning, like, for instance, right
19 now, I push very hard to get a study done, and it's-
20 in EDC right now. So I want to know how,
21 Commissioner, I can push forward to make sure it
happen. Not in 10 years ahead, but right now, what
can we do to make sure it happen?

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3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you for
4 your question, and let me just reiterate to you, I
5 too believe very much so that our parks and our
6 recreation centers are absolutely a part of- should
7 be part of the public health discussion, should be
8 part of the public safety discussions. So much of
9 putting down places like Shirley, places like Mary
10 Cali Dalton, the work that's happening at Walter
11 Gladwin and other places, and in the Bronx and across
12 the city, really does result in safer, more oper-
13 safer neighborhoods, creating more opportunity, more
14 upward mobility, and so many other things. And it's-
15 it's a joy and a privilege to be able to do that. I'm
16 grateful for your \$500,000 that you've allocated to
17 look through this, and I'm very happy to work with
18 you on this. As you know, with something like Shirley
19 Chisholm, we saw funding coming in from cities, from
20 city and the state, I believe, in terms of making
21 this a reality. I think that we should continue to
have conversations, particularly now because we are
able to show communities what can be possible when
you have purpose-built spaces. When you have new
spaces being built for modern-day recreation. And

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3 when we say recreation, we know we mean so much more
4 than just an athletic basketball court or a gym
5 where— which is great, but we see so much more. We
6 talk about arts, technology, and culture, and other
7 pieces to this. So we're happy to continue to give—
8 to work with you in terms of spreading that narrative
9 of what recreation centers, what New York City parks
10 and recreation centers actually mean. Which is way
11 more than your gym space. It is— we're talking about
12 economic development, we're talking about safer and
13 healthier neighborhoods, and I'm happy to work on
14 you— work with you and to champion that narrative.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yeah, thank you,
16 and I would like to be the catalyst to that process,
17 because it takes so long.

18 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Everything that
20 we have to do in parks is just forever, and that's
21 the reason I'm with my colleagues, what can we do,
because we feel like we are sitting, like, waiting
and things not happening. It's just like— it's just
frustrating to some level. Look at Shirley Chisholm.
You have 11,000 new members already. I was there.

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3 It's a beauty. So we can continue doing that. That's
4 all I'm saying, because I'm here, right? I mean,
5 ready to work with you. And even for the plants,
6 like, we're talking about the trees, 2,900. If we can
7 help, we have some kind of organization locally,
8 maybe we can help speed up the process. That's all
9 I'm saying. So thank you for your time and thank you,
10 Chair.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Okay, Council
12 Member Won followed by Council Member Brooks-Powers
13 on Zoom.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you so much,
15 Chair Lee. Good to see you, Commissioner. I want to—
16 I have a few questions on some of my parks. So first
17 and foremost, the capital tracker for parks is
18 severely broken and is never updated. It's extremely
19 frustrating for myself and all my constituents. So
20 Murray Park was found to have severe remediation
21 issues. It's the only dog park and playground in
Court Square, and we're still waiting for that park
to come online. Can you give us a clear update on
when that park is going to come online and when it

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3 will go into construction? Because it's been four
4 years.

5 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you,
6 Councilmember. I appreciate the comments on the
7 capital tracker. I will have to get back to you
8 specifically on the updates, which we will. We have a
9 very good track record of following up with every
10 request when it comes to these. So we'll happily give
11 you that update. I'll happily look into this myself.
12 But I wanted to tell you, with the capital tracker, I
13 hear you. We want to make sure that the information
14 is up to date, but also that is realistic on our
15 timelines. Of course, sometimes we see those
16 timelines slip back for whatever reason, but we'll
17 look into this specifically and make sure that the
18 information is as updated as possible.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Okay, because it's
20 extremely important that that park comes back online
21 and that all the soil is remediated. And next, as
part of the One Long Island City rezoning project,
the city committed to developing five acres of new
public open space under the Queensborough Bridge by
2031, including \$97.3 million in capital funding. The

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3 capital plan states on page 113 that this commitment
4 is funded through four different projects with
5 planned commitment dates starting from June 31 to
6 June 33. In correspondence with members of the parks
7 planning team, we have received confirmation that
8 this funding was supposed to begin in FY28 through
9 FY31. So it is severely behind. So the project ID
10 numbers are LIC, QNB, P2, SEED, S-E-E-D-QBAQ,
11 SEED-OSQB, and then, SEED-QBBP. Can you clarify the
12 start date for the capital funding for new open space
13 under the Queensborough Bridge as promised? And will
14 the funding timeline present any delays in the city's
15 commitment timeline to the completed new open space
16 by 2031, which is what we're assuming because of the
17 dates that you've printed? And do you expect any
18 additional funding to- will be needed to complete
19 these projects given the timeline has been pushed
20 back pointing to your latest print.

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure, we'll,
we'll have to again get- thank you for the specifics.
We'll have to get back to you specifically on where
those projects stand. However, I will tell you that I
was just- and thank you. Frankly, let me just also

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3 say thank you for your advocacy. I think that
4 additional open space is always really exciting. I
5 know that you fought very hard for this and
6 specifically were really involved. I think that will-
7 to my knowledge, and I was just briefed on this
8 project recently, I have not heard of any delays.
9 This year, so we'll have to get back to you to be
10 sure of that. Sometimes we get that funding and it's
11 allocated for funding in out-years, so that may be
12 when funding is coming to us. But I have not heard to
13 date any sort of delays with these projects. I know
14 that they were very important. They were a big win
15 for you, and we'll continue to give you updates on
16 them.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Okay. And then the
18 city also committed \$30 million in renovations to
19 renew Queensbridge Park as part of One LIC rezoning,
20 with design beginning in FY28. And the capital plan
21 dates on page 113 that this project is funded with
planned commitment dates of June 32. So again,
another delay, far beyond what was promised to us and
committed to when we- in writing. In correspondence
with members of the parks planning team, we have

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3 received confirmation that this funding was supposed
4 to begin in FY28 through to FY32, project ID
5 SEED-QBRG. Can you clarify the start date for the
6 capital funding to renew Queensbridge Park? And will
7 funding timeline present any delays to the city's
8 commitment timeline to begin design FY28? And do you
9 expect any additional funding to complete this
10 project? Because the Speaker, Adrienne Adams, the
11 former Speaker, has also committed \$12 million to
12 this project, and this is extremely vital for the
13 largest public housing community members to have
14 access to this park on time.

15 EXECUTIVE FINANCIAL OFFICER STARK: I'll
16 interject here, just for a moment to clarify. With
17 every financial plan, the agency worked closely with
18 OMB to go through what we call a rationalization
19 exercise, which is when the capital fundings are
20 actually placed in the fiscal year in which they are
21 expected to be registered. So the vast majority of a
capital project's budget gets spent down during
construction. So therefore, when a project begins,
that means it starts design. But then there is the
expected design time, the expected procurement time,

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3 you know, other additional time. So it is, very
4 common, and in fact necessary, that the relevant
5 funds, the bulk of the relevant funds, will be placed
6 in an out-year. So it's, you know, as the
7 Commissioner I think noted that, but just to provide
8 additional clarity, that sort of spreading out of
9 capital funds is extremely common, not specific to
10 those projects whatsoever, happens throughout our
11 capital portfolio.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Okay, great. I just
13 want to make sure that it's on record that the
14 Queensbridge, under the Queensbridge Park, it will be
15 completed by June 2031, and also the Queensbridge
16 Park itself will be completed by- will begin design
17 in FY28 and be completed by '32. So I just want to
18 have that on record, and I will follow up with you
19 via email to make sure that we are continuing to keep
20 this project accounted for. Thank you so much.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, great. Okay,
22 unfortunately we lost quorum, so we're going have to
23 skip ahead to Council Member Wong followed by Council
24 Member Nurse.

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3 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you, Chairs.
4 Thank you, Commissioner, for coming. We'll be
5 chatting later on the phone.

6 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes, we will.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yes. My first round
8 of question is regarding the biggest park in my part
9 of Queens, in my district, Juniper Valley Park,
10 particularly the bathrooms and capital project that's
11 involved. Right now, Juniper Valley Park currently
12 has zero functioning bathrooms. One building is out
13 of service due to an active capital project, and the
14 other closed recently due to unforeseen
15 circumstances, something to do with the sewer line.
16 This park is heavily used by seniors, families, and
17 children, especially during the summer, and we have
18 an upcoming concert in a couple days, this Thursday,
19 and then we need the bathrooms. Can your agency give
20 this Council today a firm completion date for the
21 station house bathroom near the tennis court? Because
we need it.

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yes.

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3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you for
4 your question, and I will just say that I'm in- we
5 are incredibly proud to be the largest agen- the
6 agency that provides the vast majority of public
7 restroom buildings throughout the entire city, over
8 700. That's more than there are Starbucks in the
9 city. It's a tremendous responsibility that we take
10 very seriously. So we'll get back to you specifically
11 on the updated date of the restroom project that's
12 going on in your district. But I want to also flag
13 that we can also- I would love to work with you,
14 Council Member, offline to see about- I'm of course
15 concerned about big gatherings happening in the parks
16 when there's no public restroom building available.
17 We can look at whether like some sort of porta-sand
18 [sic] situation or something else that can- could be-
19 happen there. Oh, there are already. Great. So I know
20 that we're- we- it sounds like we have some
21 porta-sands or some other temporary toilets there.
It's not ideal and it's certainly not the long-term
strategy, but we want to make sure that we are also
working closely with you to accommodate these big
events when they're happening.

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3 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: That's what- that's
4 my next question, because it took- it took me several
5 phone calls to finally get temporary sanitation
6 facilities, and the answer I was told was the cost of
7 these temporary porta-potties are not baked into any
8 capital projects, and how would park attendees go to
9 the bathroom if if there's no budget for these
10 porta-potties. And in this case, this is serious
11 because we have this huge park and both bathrooms are
12 closed. And first we asked and asked, only two
13 porta-potties were provided, and only recently
14 another two. And this- we're still asking for more
15 because in an average concert we have 400 or 500
16 people going, and four porta-potties is clearly
17 inadequate. And that's my question. Why- why are
18 porta-potties not budgeted into capital projects?
19 Because it makes no sense.

20 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: You know, it
21 really- and I appreciate the question, and I'm glad
to hear that we're working with your office, and we
work with others. I was just talking to another
council member, I think Aviles, about porta-sans in
her District 2. While we have- while we have a

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3 capital project going on. It's difficult to bake
4 something like that into our contracts, one, because
5 I don't actually know if that's a capital eligible
6 piece to it, but two- it's not. And then two, every
7 park project is different. We may have a park where
8 we have one capital project going on where it doesn't
9 require it because there's another porta- there's
10 another public restroom building in that park, so
11 they would be able to find the bathroom elsewhere,
12 while as some we think are going be- are going to be
13 handled in the wintertime where we think it can
14 handle it, versus others where unfortunately at
15 Juniper Park you have kind of, unfortunately all the
16 bathrooms are down at one time. So it's difficult for
17 us to predict and it's also not capitally eligible.
18 So it's unfortunately not something that we're able
19 to do. But I will say that I'm- you know, we are very
20 sensitive towards wanting to make sure that even when
21 these capital projects are happening, that
communities are still able to use their parks. So in
the cases like this, I'm very happy to hear that
we're providing those public- those temporary public

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3 bathrooms is not the ideal situation, but at least
4 there's something there.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: So we'll talk later
6 about this, and there's some other issues that we
7 need to resolve with you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank
8 you, Chair.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. Thank you. And
10 next we have Council Member Nurse, and then the Chair
11 will be asking Council Member Brooks-Powers'
12 questions.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you. I'm
14 going to talk about my district parks because that's
15 what we do at parks hearings. But, I want to say
16 Highland Park, amazing. Thank you. I always love the
17 maintenance and attention given there. Tiger
18 Playground, great. I have no issues. My issues are at
19 Irving Playground and Irving Square Park and Bushwick
20 Playground behind Bushwick Campus. And that is where
21 I need, at least for Bushwick Campus, extraordinary
attention this summer for enforcement. I've done
years of walkthroughs. There's 1,000 emails to you
all. You all know about this area. Last summer, we
had a couple stabbings. It was really bad. All the

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3 time, it was a source of nonstop complaints, and
4 Bushwick Campus, that park, we really need attention
5 this year. So, I don't know how many PEP officers you
6 have in Brooklyn. Every time I call and ask, there's
7 like only 12 in the whole borough or whatever. I
8 don't know where we're at now, but we do need
9 extraordinary attention this summer. I'm only asking
10 for one park to have attention, and it is that park.
11 The 83rd does what they can for it, but we really, we
12 really need attention there. With Irving, it's less
13 about enforcement, but I do often see a lot of our
14 volunteers pushing non-electric mowers to mow the
15 grass. I mean, it would be great if we could get the
16 grass cut on time. I don't know if there's a
17 schedule, but I hate to see that. I mean, I love
18 people doing their part, but I don't want these folks
19 having to mow the grass in our little park. And then
20 we have a bathroom there now. So I'd love to talk
21 with you all about a Playground Associate there, and
also making sure that that bathroom is stocked on a
regular basis, because we've gotten a lot of
complaints about that.

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3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you
4 so much, Council Member. Let me just thank you so
5 much for your comments. I really appreciate it. We
6 can certainly look at Bushwick and Irving. I wrote
7 those down. I just want to clarify that for our PEP
8 staffing, we have 53 staff members that are baselined
9 for Brooklyn, 53 in the Bronx, 53 in Manhattan, 53 in
10 Queens, 32 in Staten Island. Again, that's for the
11 entire borough. So do you—

12 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: [interposing] How
13 many are assigned to North Brooklyn?

14 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I would have to
15 get back to you.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yeah, I would love
17 to know. Every time I call, it's like we only have
18 five people on. I just can never get anybody there.
19 Yeah, I'm always call the precinct, call the
20 precinct, and the precinct's busy, you know.

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Absolutely. And I
will say also that I know that that doesn't feel- it
has a very different feeling as well when it comes to
also we see our, our PEP officers who are, that are
then at our pools and at our beaches. And so they do

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3 cover a lot of ground and we're very proud of every
4 single one of them.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: I understand.

6 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: You had mentioned
7 in terms of bathrooms and mowing, so I wanted to just
8 mention the grass.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yeah, just getting
10 the grass cut.

11 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah. So,
12 certainly while we're have— we do have a regular
13 schedule. I'll look to our First Deputy Commissioner
14 to share a little bit more about that regular
15 schedule of grass cutting. If there's anything in
16 particular that we're not seeing, we appreciate your
17 feedback on that.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Well, I always let—
19 I always let the Brooklyn Commissioner know when it's
20 time, but it would be nice to not have to do that.

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yep.

COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: And then for the
bathrooms, our— I'll ask our First Deputy
Commissioner also to speak on this, but we do monitor

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3 everything from soap to toilet paper to working
4 fixtures in our public restroom buildings. So we will
5 certainly look at this because it would be coming up.
6 We monitor this on a regular basis, and we're happy
7 to have the First Deputy Commissioner speak more to
8 this.

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Council
10 Member, the site should be mown on a two-week cycle.
11 Okay, so we'll look into it. We track the data. I can
12 look at a dashboard. As the Commissioner said, our
13 public restrooms— we have three touch points a day at
14 every one of our public restrooms because we unlock
15 them in the morning, check to make sure they're
16 stocked, they're cleaned at least once a day if not
17 more times, and then obviously at the end of the day
18 we close them. So there's a minimum of three touch
19 points. So there shouldn't— there may be any moment
20 in time when we may have gone in, stocked, and it,
21 you know, it happens regularly.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: I understand. I
23 understand sometimes you go in there and clean it, an
24 hour later it doesn't look like that. I get it. I
25 just— I'm advocating for attention there. There have

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3 been many nights we've had events there. We've let
4 parks know, hey, we're going to have an event there,
5 can you make sure the bathroom's open, make sure it's
6 stocked? It's not open, it's not stocked, we got to
7 chase people for an hour. It's just like some- it's
8 just some like baseline of maintenance I think would
9 be- especially when we proactively let you know about
10 certain things going on in the park. We'd really love
11 just some attention this summer because I don't
12 really ask much for Parks, just those two. Thank you.

13 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thanks.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay. Alright. I'm
15 just going- you can put the timer on. I'm going to
16 ask questions on behalf of Council Member
17 Brooks-Powers who's online. The Executive Plan
18 includes a baselined increase of about \$121,000 of
19 city funding beginning in FY26 for lifeguards covered
20 by the additional compensation fund, CBA. How many
21 vacant lifeguarding positions remain across New York
City? And if you can just answer, you know, very
quickly.

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, very
quickly. Okay, so we- so we are funded for 1,400

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3 lifeguards. We— that's our— we have said that that
4 was pre-pandemic our height. We last year were at
5 1,100, a little less than 1,100. We won't have our
6 final numbers until later on this July. Things are
7 looking very good. We're very optimistic about
8 hitting a higher number than we were at last year. At
9 this point in time last year compared to now, we are
10 at higher numbers. So we'll be able to fully answer
that and give kind of our full numbers by the 4th of
July.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. With
12 this baseline increase, does Parks intend to increase
the number of staff lifeguards?

13 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I'm sorry, can
14 you repeat that question?

15 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: With this baseline
16 increase, does Parks intend to increase the number of
staff lifeguards?

17 EXECUTIVE FINANCIAL OFFICER STARK: Yeah,
18 sorry, I believe it's a— so it was a collective
19 bargaining. So it's sort of essentially a pay
20 increase, so not a headcount change.
21

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3 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Given the recent
4 drowning deaths on Rockaway Beach, how does the Parks
5 Department intend to prioritize lifeguard staffing
6 for the Rockaway Peninsula this summer?

7 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure, let me just
8 say before I pass it over to our First Deputy
9 Commissioner who oversees the lifeguard division,
10 that we are incredibly sad to see this- the drowning
11 that happened at Rockaways. I want to thank the NYPD
12 and FDNY and Emergency Management, of course our
13 lifeguards who are all there and looking into this
14 further. I just want to use this as an opportunity
15 because I have yet to say it, but I want to just ask
16 all of our elected officials' help in reminding
17 everyone that it is only safe to swim in our water
18 when there's a lifeguard sitting in a chair, when
19 they're saying that it is okay to swim. Otherwise,
20 you should not be in the water. It is incredibly
21 important to remember this as kind of a simple rule
of thumb. When it comes to our overall water safety
plan, this is something that is- has been truly kind
of honed in over years of experience, over years of
working with colleagues and looking at other

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3 operations across the country. Truly, we believe in
4 our water safety plans. We believe in our water
5 safety protocol. We are looking to fully- to again,
6 follow through on our lifeguard plan that we had last
7 year, and it was tremendously successful. But I'll
8 look to our First Deputy Commissioner to give more
9 details.

10 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Council
11 Member, as I mentioned earlier, as of today we have
12 153 lifeguards at Rockaways, which is more than twice
13 the next closest beach, which is 70 at Coney Island.
14 We traditionally staff- of all of our beach
15 lifeguards, which is about 600 when we're at our
16 peak, over 55 percent of them go to the Rockaways, 45
17 percent cover our other seven beaches. So the
18 majority of our lifeguards always go to the
19 Rockaways.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. How
21 much funding does Parks Department have allocated for
the Trees and Sidewalks program to repair severe
sidewalk damage caused by root growth? We have heard
from constituents that the wait time for this program

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3 takes years. What is the agency doing to expedite
4 this service?

5 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes, thank you so
6 much. We have- we do have a program that is- it deals
7 with trees and sidewalks concerns for qualifying
8 qualifying applicants. The funding is \$13 million,
9 which allows us to repair approximately 1,300 sites
10 per year.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Are you planning
12 to explore the implementation of an emergency system
13 along Rockaway Beach?

14 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: You know, we have
15 had a lot of conversations about this. We are always
16 interested in looking at additional ways to get
17 emergency alerts out there to increase water safety.
18 Rockaway Beach is particularly difficult because
19 there's not, to our knowledge, a system that can
20 allow for the five-plus miles of boardwalk to receive
21 that notification system through the PA system. That
has been discussed. We're happy to continue to look
at this. We do have an audio system at Orchard Beach,
which is much smaller. So if there is a system out
there that can, like, provide this, we're happy to

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3 continue to look into it. Rockaway Beach is a very
4 large beach in order to cover all of that. So always
5 interested in additional notification systems. It's
6 just the size of it is really difficult to find a
7 system that can work. I'll let our First Deputy
8 Commissioner add more to that.

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: I would
10 just note that we're always pushing notification
11 communications out through NYC Notify for folks that
12 subscribe to that. We really emphasize that frequent
13 beachgoers, particularly folks in the Rockaways,
14 should subscribe to NYC Notify. And also, as you're
15 aware, we're purchasing new emergency response
16 vehicles specifically for our lifeguards to use on
17 the sand to respond to emergencies.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Final
19 question. This is from Council Member Shanel
20 Thomas-Henry. The Executive Plan includes an
21 additional \$1.7 million for 200 additional seasonal
positions due to the World Cup. The Queen's Fan Fest
is in her district in Flushing Meadows, Corona Park.
How many of those positions are for this event in

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3 particular, and is any effort being made to hire
4 locally for those positions?

5 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: So our— so we're
6 very excited about and grateful for the 200 positions
7 that will be able to bring on onboard as of the start
8 of the fiscal year. I think that they are truly— we
9 always use, when it comes to deploying staff, a
10 data-driven approach towards looking out for our
11 sites that are most in need and we know are going to
12 be hotspots. So we'll continue to be in communication
13 around where those staff go to. But I want to just
14 say a huge thank you to the administration and OMB
15 for understanding that our parks are where everybody
16 is going to be this summer. It is going to be an
17 incredibly busy summer in our parks. It always is,
18 but with— but a lot of the best viewing locations are
19 going to be in our park system, and we'll be
20 continuing to have— being in close communication with
21 NYCEM and others about where we expect to see the
largest crowds.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you,
Commissioner. I'm sorry, there was one more question,
final question from Council Member Brooks Powers, and

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3 I'm going to turn it over. On May 12th, the council
4 member sent a letter to the Parks Department
5 regarding compliance with Local Law 132 of 2023. The
6 law requires the city to survey city-owned property
7 that may be suitable for the construction of new
8 public swimming pools and release survey results by
9 October 1st, 2025. Despite repeated outreach by the
10 council's compliance division to DPR, DOE, and City
11 Hall, Council still has not received any report, nor
12 has the administration told the Council which agency
13 will be responsible for the implementation of Council
14 Member Brooks-Powers' sponsored Local Law. Can the
15 agency please provide an update on the compliance
16 with this law?

17 UNIDENTIFIED: Yes, thank you for the
18 question. My recollection is that the bill as dra- as
19 passed required the mayor's office to designate a,
20 you know, an entity to lead the effort. We're going
21 to have to circle back to mayor's office and get an
update. My understanding is an entity to this point
in time had not been identified.

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3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, great. And next we
4 have Council Member Krishnan before we go to round
5 two.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you,
7 Chairs, and good to see you, Commissioner and team,
8 as always, and all the parks advocates here. I just
9 had a couple of questions to follow up on some points
10 that were already discussed. But my first one is, it
11 is concerning to see the underfunding of PEP officers
12 in the budget so far. And I just want to get an
13 understanding. So normally we have 300 PEP officers,
14 which we know not enough for the whole city, 60 per
15 borough. As of right now with the Executive Budget,
16 only 200 have been funded. OMB and the Council are
17 pushing for another 100 on top of that. Is that— is
18 that right?

19 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Your numbers are
20 almost— are almost there. So, 354 officers total.
21 That's including 100 of our one-shot officers. So, in
the case where— which we hope would not happen, but
we— in the case where we would not get that one-shot
funding either baselined or in one-shot, then we
would lose those 100 lines. But currently, I think

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3 the, like, discussion has been whether or not those
4 354- those 100 officers could be baselined into,
5 like, into fully into our ranks. And then of course,
6 we would of course always welcome additional PEP
7 officers through new one-shot.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Right, right.
9 Okay. And so right now, those 100- so those are, you
10 know, obviously officers right now who are funded-
11 their positions are funded only through June 30th of
12 this year, correct?

13 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And then
15 without a one-shot or without them being baselined,
16 their positions would not exist after July 1st,
17 right? I mean, I know that Parks will make every
18 other effort to find other places for them, but I
19 just want to get an understanding of what that would
20 mean for PEP starting July 1st.

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. I mean,
that's with every single one-shot position. We are
only funded through the fiscal year, and after that,
that's- there's no more funding.

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3 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Yeah, yeah. I
4 mean, obviously, the first and foremost, and I've
5 always said this too, the Parks budget is such
6 fundamentally a workers' budget. I know they're- they
7 are all, as workers, very concerned about their
8 positions. What have the conversations been like, to
9 the best that you can share, with City Hall and OMB?
10 Because there- with all that's going on in our parks
11 this summer, and you're hearing it from, you know,
12 everyone too, whether it's the World Cup, whether,
13 you know, it's NBA Finals and other park celebrations
14 and things like that, it is concerning that we
15 haven't been able to get the PEP officer count much
16 higher. And so what have the conversations been with
17 City Hall and the OMB so far? And how does Parks plan
18 to adequately staff the parks across the borough when
19 there's basically, at best, 60 officers per borough?

20 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you
21 for your question. Our conversations have been pretty
robust and ongoing and overwhelmingly positive, I'd
say. I believe that this administration understands
the impact that our PEP officers bring. I'm very
grateful for the advocacy of the Council, yourself of

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3 course included, and many parkies know how much you
4 fought for us, and so we are grateful to you. I think
5 that we also understand that it is our- it is our
6 absolute goal to serve our city regardless of the
7 actual number of resources. So whether it be with
8 our- with our current ranks now, or, you know,
9 unfortunately in a situation where we would have
10 fewer staff, we will continue to- we will continue to
11 meet the mission that we have. I would say
12 overwhelmingly this administration understands the
13 absolute incredible impact that parks have and the
14 role, the vital role that we play in creating an
15 affordable city, an affordable future for our city,
16 and I'm very proud to continue to uphold that. Thank
17 you, and look forward. Thank you for your kind words.
18 Also looking forward to working with you all and City
19 Hall to make sure we get that number to where it
20 needs to be. And then just the hiring freeze- in the
21 Preliminary Budget time, we talked about the hiring
freeze. What is the status of lifting that hiring
freeze at this point? How is that looking so far?
And what more can you comment on?

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3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, very good.

4 I mean, honestly, we are- we're very- we were, as
5 many other agencies I'm sure will say, we're very
6 excited about having the two-for-one kind freeze
7 lifted and having the ability to actually fill the
8 vacancy spots that we have when they become
9 available. I'm very grateful to OMB. We've worked- we
10 had a lot of conversations about the 40 positions
11 that were kind of vacancies in our ranks and are very
12 much looking forward to being able to- right now
13 we're pretty much full, but as- what we also see on
14 any given month, just through nature of attrition and
15 retirements and things like that, we see empty
16 spaces, empty seats come up across the agency, and it
17 is very exciting to think about a world in which we
18 get to hire for those seats.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Great, glad to
20 hear it. And then just concluding by just saying I'm
21 glad to hear the progress on the lifeguard issue.
There's a big crisis. A lot more to do on that. You
know, any ways that we can work together to keep
increasing lifeguard count. One of the things that
I've been focused on, and we can talk more about it,

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3 you know, later too, is, you know, not only sta-
4 fully staffing our pools and beaches, but I also feel
5 like our pool and beach season is too short given how
6 warm it's getting earlier in the year, how warm it
7 stays later in the year. And, you know, it would
8 really help a lot if we can extend pool and beach
9 season. I think also will improve water safety
10 because you'd have lifeguard staffing at times when
11 it's hot and people want to swim, where right now the
12 beaches are closed. So, I hope it's a conversation we
13 can continue having to find a way to staff up and
14 then also look at expanding pool and beach season.

15 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure, I
16 appreciate it. You know, I- this is- it comes up a
17 lot, and I- and thank you so much. I would happily
18 have- continue to have conversations around it. I
19 will point out that this is- this particular summer
20 is going to be our longest beach season ever. It'll
21 be- I think I think it's four full months, four full
months, 16 weeks of open beaches. It is a lot. I
also- you know, a part of our regrowing our lifeguard
ranks has also included- we rely heavily on a kind of
college and young person workforce that is only

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3 available when school gets out. And so a lot of these
4 factors kind of definitely factor into- and of course
5 our training, which starts in February to train new
6 lifeguards and to bring them on board. So it is a
7 system that I don't think a lot of people- of course,
8 Council Member, you know this very well, and we're
9 grateful for that, but when we talk about making
10 shifts to that season, we really are talking about
11 making shifts to essentially six months of our
12 operation.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Right.

14 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Because that's
15 how long it takes to really roll this out. But of
16 course, I'm- I've particularly loved in my first few
17 months a better understanding and learning all about
18 our beaches. It is an insanely complex operation that
19 I am so proud of our team for currently doing. So I'm
20 always happy to talk about ways that we can get more
21 people to the water safely and keep everybody safe in
22 our public realm in total.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Absolutely. And
24 expand that pipeline too, as you're saying. Well,
25 thank you for your work. Thank you for your

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3 leadership. And looking forward to our continued work
4 together. Thank you, Chairs.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. And then we are
6 going to- actually, I'm just going to kick it off
Chair Hankerson for round two.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, we're going
8 to go into round two. I'm going to somewhat speed
9 through this. As they say in church, the time is well
10 spent. So let's see if we can get this quickly. As I
11 am sure you know, I have been incredibly- I've been
12 incredibly vocal about my belief that equal work
13 should result in equal pay. This came up when I
14 raised the issue of parks staff being paid less than
15 sanitation staff for clearing snow during the series
16 of blizzards that we saw earlier this year. It is
17 entirely unacceptable that our parks staff not only
18 had to sleep in rec centers, but were also not paid
19 in parity with other city agencies. Will the Parks
20 Department support pay parity with sanitation workers
21 that performed the same work but received greater
pay? This is an issue of fairness for equal work, for
equal pay.

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3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you
4 for your question, and thank you for your advocacy. I
5 absolutely am always on board with all of my staff
6 getting paid more money and getting recognized for
7 the incredibly difficult work. I will just point out
8 that during the snowstorm that we had on- it was, I
9 think, day -1 or -2 for me, but it was right at the
10 beginning in February. It was tremendous. The- and I
11 talked about it before, but it's worth repeating.
12 Hundreds of our staff working alongside DSNY,
13 thousands of our staff going out and clearing our
14 perimeter sidewalks. I'm incredibly proud of the job
15 that our park staff do 365 days a year, but really on
16 those snowstorms, they really showed up, and I'm very
17 proud of them. When it comes to their salary, that is
18 something that is negotiated by and large by the city
19 and by our brothers and sisters in labor. And so of
20 course, we're always happy to, but this is something
21 that when it comes to their specific titles, and
we'll just flag that they are- there are different
titles involved in those who are doing the clearing.
That's all negotiated beyond kind of the Parks
Department and really with labor and the city.

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3 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Kind of had a
4 feeling you were going to say that. So will Parks
5 support pay equity in the next round of contract
6 negotiations?

7 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I'm always- I
8 don't know sanitation numbers, but I'm thrilled to
9 champion additional funding for our workers.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I appreciate that.
11 Additionally, Parks had to move \$3.7 million in this
12 plan to cover the cost of snow removal overtime since
13 it was not previously included in the budget. Will
14 Parks add a snow removal overtime budget in the
15 future to better prepare for potential snowstorms?

16 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: So, I think that
17 this is one where we're happy to- I'm very grateful
18 to OMB because they also recognize Parks' role in
19 this. It was a very exciting conversation to hear
20 that we were going to receive additional funding and
21 recognition for the overtime that was spent in that
snowstorm. Whether it be through a different line or
working directly with OMB, I'm not sure if there's
that much difference there, as long as we are
continuing to get support from our city in terms of

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3 our response to those snowstorms, which I'm extremely
4 grateful that we did receive.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: So, will- would
6 Parks be willing to change its budget for snow
7 removal and preparation similar to how DSNY changes
8 their future snow budget based on previous expenses?

9 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I think- I mean,
10 our budget is in terms of, like, our overtime, we
11 will be using all of our overtime budget. There's no
12 question about it. We'll, likely be going over that
13 and be working with them with OMB to correct this.
14 This is not something where we are, you know,
15 necessarily like saving some and then spending less
16 later, because ultimately we know that Parks- that
17 people are using our parks every season, and so we'll
18 have our staff out every season. You know, again, I'm
19 always happy to- I will just say here that the
20 conversations that we've been having with the city,
21 with the administration, and with OMB have been
extraordinarily promising when it comes to their
support of our overtime in the snowstorm and their
continued support now, I think, as seen in this
budget around the staff needed to respond to the

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3 needs to what we expect to be increased usage of our
4 parks this summer.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'm going to jump
6 to the Deputy Speaker really quickly before I
7 continue my questions. Doctor?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you so
9 much, Chair. Just a few questions on the racial
10 equity plans, and I really want to thank our central
11 staff for preparing these questions. We're excited
12 about the racial equity plans and its use in these
13 budget hearings. So one of the goals of the Parks
14 Department and the prelim racial equity plan is to
15 establish human capital practices that support and
16 accelerate equitable hiring and staffing in close
17 collaboration with senior leadership. This is listed
18 as a me- a medium-term goal to be completed in 2028.
19 Under Section 1C, it states that identifying race and
20 ethnicity is optional in a footnote. Can you please
21 explain how demographic analysis focusing on race can
be done if identifying race and ethnicity is
optional?

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah. Thank you
so much for your question, Deputy Speaker. So we

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3 have- so our- the way that we are gathering this data
4 is through our DEIB office that does an annual
5 survey. It is- we, in that annual survey of our
6 employees, it is- we do give them the option of
7 identifying based on their race, and they can either-
8 they can identify or they can't, and that's what
9 we're reporting on. So, is that what your question is
10 referring to? I'm sorry if I'm-

11 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: [interposing]

12 Yeah-

13 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: misunderstanding
14 it.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Like,
16 essentially, you all established this goal around
17 equitable hiring, but it's not a requirement for
18 people to identify their race. So we're just trying
19 to understand-

20 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: [interposing] It
21 is-

UNIDENTIFIED: [interposing] In addition
to-

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: [interposing]
How can you have an analysis?

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3 UNIDENTIFIED: If I can just, sorry,
4 quickly clarify, in addition to the survey, the DEI-
5 there's also every city employee, you know, through
6 employee self-service, the sort of employee portal,
7 there's a- again it is voluntary, it is
8 self-reported, but that data is also available
9 through that mode as well. And then the percentage is
10 actually only about 93 percent of parks employees do
11 report. So there actually is a, we would argue, a
12 pretty healthy base of data to assess from which
13 informs the goal there.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yeah, and I
15 think also looking at actual title. So there have
16 been many reports about various positions in city
17 government, like typically, unfortunately, like
18 lower-wage titles tend to be Black and Brown people.
19 Senior-level executive positions tend to be white
20 people. So, I just, you know, want to understand how
21 you guys are, like, doing that analysis and making
sure that the Parks Department is equitable from the
top to the bottom?

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Absolutely. So
this is something that's very near and dear to my

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3 heart. I frankly don't believe that I would be in the
4 position that I was in- I'm in now without people
5 believing that people who look like me and people who
6 come from my background were able to be in these
7 roles. And so I take it really seriously. I'm- saw,
8 too, and was very happy to see our racial equity
9 plan. But I saw too that we are going to start to
10 disaggregate this data and start to break it down by
11 title. We have a lot of titles. We have a wide range
12 of workers in our agency. But I am very much looking
13 forward to building this in, because I do believe
14 it's not just about those entry-level jobs. We have
15 to be building pipelines. We have to be building ways
16 to elevate workers of every background. And so I'm
17 looking forward to digging this into the further.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: And then, why
19 will the review of the demographic data take almost
20 two years?

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: You know, again,
this is where- this is where I'm hoping that we can
get- we can deliver something sooner than that. But
certainly, we do have a lot of titles. We have a lot
of different- and we're looking at, again, then the

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3 breakdown of who's reporting this data. We're doing
4 this on an annual basis. But I would love to see if
5 we can speed this up.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Do you have any
7 insight on any areas of significant disparities of
8 race or gender within the agency?

9 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I mean, I only
10 have right now our agency-wide numbers, and I don't
11 think it's- I'm happy to share a little bit of that
12 data if you'd like. I-

13 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: [interposing]
14 Yeah, and any current demographic breakdown of the
15 agency.

16 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. So I'd say
17 that- so based on our last DEIB annual report, we
18 have 30 percent- 33 percent of our agency identifies
19 as African American, 28 percent Hispanic, 23 percent
20 white, six percent Asian American, seven percent did
21 not disclose, and then we have a breakdown of 63
percent male, 36 percent female. We also, I think
we're just- I think the Commission on Racial Equity
just put out scores for every agency, and I saw that
we ranked 66 out of 72. It was a good- it was a good

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3 thing, because 72, I think is the best you can be in
4 this case. And so, yeah, I'd say that again, it's all
5 based then. I think we need to dive deeper down into
6 this data to look at the specific titles and the
7 specific roles. I would love to see abilities for
8 growth and professional development and growth and
9 promotion in every kind of title that we have. So
10 we'll love to work with you closer on this and bring
11 you back additional information.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yeah, I would
13 love to also know, like, out of that breakdown,
14 again, like, job function, like, the demographical
15 data by job function as well?

16 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: So where are
18 the, like, pretty much 50 percent of Black and Latino
19 workers? Like, what type of position titles do they
20 have within the agency? Where are, like, the six
21 percent of, like, Asian employees? Like, where are
they working?

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. I mean,
we'll happily give you that information as we
continue to compile it.

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3 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Just out of
5 curiosity, I guess continuing in the line of
6 questioning. Are there pathways to promotion in the
7 department? And if so, what are they?

8 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Absolutely. I
9 mean, I think- I'm going to ask our Deputy
10 Commissioner Margaret Nelson to come up too. And
11 between our First Deputy Commissioner and our Deputy
12 Commissioner who represents some of our biggest units
13 within the agency, I'm sure that they can talk about
14 it. So Margaret, come on up. But let me just say that
15 some of our- I mean, Iris Rodriguez-Rosa was well
16 known within this agency. She started, I believe, as
17 a recreation specialist and has, like, worked her way
18 up. You talk to a lot of parkies who have been around
19 for 30 to 40 years and a lot of the time that's been
20 the upward trajectory for many people to find those
21 pathways for promotion. We do see, like, with our
22 Playground Associates program, which is really a very
23 tough but very exciting job, you see that you get a
24 lot of on-the-ground experience working with the
25 public, working with kids, and you oftentimes see

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3 those Playground Associates, which are seasonal jobs,
4 getting turned into full-time recreation staff and-

5 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: [interposing] Not
6 to cut you off, but I think we appreciate I
7 appreciate that, but I think to the Deputy Speaker's
8 line of questioning, I think it leans more towards
9 not those who may have worked their way up, but those
10 who are being hired at executive and management
11 levels from the start. And so I would be interested
12 in the data that you provide to her as well. Sorry.

13 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure, sure.
14 Sorry. Those to- who end up in, like, leadership.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Yes.

16 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes, no problem.
17 And, um, I mean, not to be super dramatic about this,
18 but like, even looking at my- the staff who are here,
19 I know have, like, worked their way up in the agency
20 and under different commissioners and have, like,
21 served different roles kind of moving their way up.
22 So, there is definitely that culture at Parks. But I
23 also want to say to the Deputy Speaker's points that
24 I truly believe that we should and can be doing more.
25 I think that pipelines, particularly for

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3 underrepresented workers, be them workers of color or
4 women, particularly in a male-dominated agency like
5 is— like that is mine, is extremely important to name
6 outright and to think about fully. I think that we
7 should be looking at this data as closely as we can,
8 and I'm quite frankly very proud of the 93 percent
9 reporting rate. There's always an opportunity for
10 someone not to identify. I think I myself have opted
11 not to identify sometimes when I take those types of
12 surveys, but I think that still 93 percent is a good
13 enough number to know with some surety that the data
14 that we're looking at is showing some truth, and I'm
15 very eager to continue to look at this. I take it
16 really seriously. I'll let— oh go ahead.

17 UNIDENTIFIED: Sorry, and just really
18 quickly, just for context, just as a reminder that,
19 like, promotional opportunities also exist in sort of
20 ecosystems system, the civil service system, right?
21 So there are exams and promotional opportunities. So
that's a very important overlay, right, that these
promotions aren't necessarily, you know, done at an
individual discretion.

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3 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Absolutely. And I
4 understand that. But when I say pathways, I'm
5 referring to, are there programs to assist folks?
6 Are- you know, for instance, the NYPD recently had a
7 panel, you know, for Black and Brown officers who are
8 looking to get promoted. And so that's what I mean
9 when I say pathway. So, but I do appreciate that
10 answer.

11 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah. And, and we
12 do have- so there's a lot of people who want to talk
13 about this just because we have a lot to say about
14 this topic, which is very good. So I'm going to look
15 to Margaret really quick to share a little bit more
16 about that promotional track. And then, we also have
17 Joy Wang on our team who can speak a little bit more
18 to, like, we have apprenticeships and internships and
19 other- like, we have a Parks Academy that helps with
20 other, like, professional development skills. There's
21 a lot here that we do, and we are very enthusiastic
about it.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'd love to
continue that conversation, but we only have five
minutes.

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3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Okay, so then
4 I'll just say that we have halfway- we have
5 apprenticeships, we have internships, we have Parks
6 Academy, we have professional development trainings.
7 We are so- we have- we have our own group of like
8 rising stars that we want to, like, see promoted
9 higher, and we develop them with additional kind of
10 training and like being part of another group that
11 we're investing them within a year. Go ahead Margaret
12 and share a little bit more about recreation.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Yeah, sure. I
14 mean, recreation and PEP. I think for PEP, you know,
15 we hire seasonal CSA officers who are out in the
16 summer with our beaches and pools. Sometimes- and we
17 also have, year-round CSAs. Often we pull from them
18 to become permanent PEP officers, and then they go
19 through the academy training and become peace
20 officers. So that's one of the pipelines. I will say,
21 even though we're working hard to reduce the
attrition for our PEP officers, and we want to keep
them in PEP. When they leave, sometimes they're not
necessarily leaving to go to other law enforcement.
They're staying within our agency and going to other

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3 divisions. So you'll see a lot of PEP office- people
4 who started out in the PEP division who are in other
5 divisions in our agency and moving up in the agency.
6 So again, given that we're a large agency, it's
7 really nice to see people kind of move around in the
8 agency and work their way up that way. And then
9 obviously in recreation, when we hire seasonally for
10 our PAs or summer camps, that that is a good pipeline
11 into year-round work. And then moving up, you know,
12 recreation specialists, and they come- a deputy
13 center manager, the center manager, then borough
14 recreation. And again, we have people who start out
15 in recreation and maybe move over to the M&O
16 division, you know, with their skill set in
17 recreation, and again, stay in the agency but move
18 around to other positions.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. I'm
20 going to try and combine these last two or three
21 questions. The Executive Plan includes \$11 million in
additional revenue from a park concession expansion.
The council's prelim- prelim- excuse me, preliminary
budget response included a proposal to expand parks
concessions to generate additional revenue. How many

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3 concessions are currently operated in New York City
4 parks? Can you please explain how Parks plans to
5 collect this additional revenue? And does the agency
6 have any plans to expand the number of concessions in
7 parks?

8 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Great. So we have
9 around 400 concessions in our parks, and they really
10 have the wide range. It is everything from ice cream
11 and sandwiches to major circuses and big events to
12 pizza fests and everything in between. We expanded
13 the amount of revenue going into the general fund
14 from this, and in part, it is because we already
15 achieved that. We know that this is what our
16 concessions are building in. It's also baked into our
17 contracts with those concessions. It's— we know with
18 some— with a high level of assurity that the— that
19 this is what our concessions will be giving in
20 because it's baked into their contracts. That being
21 said, we are also— I also should have started out
this way, but I want to make sure to be clear about
my view on concessions. This is not about monetizing
our parks. This is about creating amenities and
additional activations that really serve to

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complement the user experience. As a mom of a three and a six-year-old, I couldn't stay in the park longer if I didn't have the ability to buy a sandwich for my kids, or be— when I'm stuck in February and it's raining outside to I find as a way to get my kids back into the parks through— be it through some sort of concession event, is a really special experience to allow me to be in the parks with my family 365 days a year if I wanted to. And so I— you know, that's really where we're looking at to complement the park system and make sure that we're serving the needs of New Yorkers who want to see a little something extra. And we're really excited about not only— there was a CUFF report recently talking about additional revenue building in, and we're really excited to be following up on that. We have, I think, 19 new concessions starting in the next year, and we're very eager to see more of these spaces activated in very creative ways. I also want to point out that one major huge win this year for us, and then true honor, was to open up the Workers Justice Project Deliveristas Hub, which will be fully operating come June, which is not— it is a

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3 technically a concession, but it's a very low-income
4 concession that we don't expect to really be
5 generating a ton of money, but really serves our New
6 Yorkers and serves our workforce in a way that I am
7 just so incredibly proud of. So I'm very proud of the
8 entire team. I want to see if David's thrown-- if I
9 hopefully didn't misspeak any of that, but, you know,
10 I hope that answers your questions here. And David,
11 if I missed anything, please say it. But, we're
12 really excited about kind of the future of
13 concessions in our parks.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Did you want to
15 add anything?

16 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER CERRON: You
17 covered it very well, Commissioner. I'm here just in
18 case.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: So I don't get in
20 trouble, I want to ask this question. As part of the
21 contract that DPR has with the Wildlife Conservation
Society, the agency will reimburse the zoos for any
revenue shortfalls at the end of the fiscal year when
revenues are lower than-- when revenues are lower than
expenses. The Executive Plan includes \$10 million in

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3 FY26 for the zoo funding shortfall. How does this
4 total compare to previous years? Are there any
5 efforts by DPR and/or WCS to increase revenue? And
6 can you provide a breakdown of revenue and expenses
7 at each zoo and aquarium? Actually, you can- don't
worry about the last one.

8 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Okay, sure. So, I
9 mean, this is- the WCS contract, Wildlife,
10 Conservation Society's, relationship with DPR is one
11 of the oldest relationships I think that we have. I
12 actually think the Arsenal Building used to be the
13 part of the zoo way back when. That may be mistaken,
14 but I think it would- like, we have a very
15 longstanding relationship. And, yes, it is- this is
16 like pretty standard across, like, across our
17 budgets. This is what we've had for some time. And
18 actually, I think we did- the agency did notify our
19 council partners that last year we did- they did
20 actually increase the ticket cost a touch. My- I can
21 say this with a lot of experience, actually, we know
that the zoos are a beloved portion of a way to enjoy
our parks. It was once time a part of the Parks
Department, believe it or not, and we know that,

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3 like, that the- our partners at the Wildlife
4 Conservation Society do some incredible work with our
5 public schools, with low-income programming to really
6 make sure that they're as accessible to every New
7 Yorker as possible. It's a point of pride that we're
8 very excited to be close partners here. But that
9 budget piece of the \$10 million has not really
10 significantly changed over the past several years.
11 And we are very keenly looking at ways to slightly
12 increase costs- increase our revenue while still
13 making sure that it's accessible as possible to New
14 Yorkers.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. And my
16 final question- this one is a little off script since
17 this is- both you and I, our first budget in these
18 capacities.

19 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: My question to
21 you, and I'm going to ask you this probably in three
years as well. What do you want your legacy to be in
this agency?

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I really want New
Yorker- thank you for the question, and I'll be sure

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3 to ask you the same thing after this at some point. I
4 really want New Yorkers to understand the incredible
5 significance of this agency in their lives. I want us
6 to be valued as such. I want New Yorkers to
7 understand that we're not just a place that should
8 come top of mind after Memorial Day weekend and when
9 Labor Day hits. I want the entire city to— and all of
10 our council and our administration and everybody to
11 understand that this is an agency that is full of
12 essential public workers that are really creating
13 excellence in the public realm for free, because
14 everybody deserves a park.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Parks for
16 everyone. Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Chair.

17 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thanks.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. Thank you. And I
19 believe that is all for now, and we will— that
20 concludes our second day of budget hearings. Thank
21 you.

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thanks for joining us.

[gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date August 22, 2026