



**TESTIMONY BEFORE
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON PARKS & RECREATION**

**FISCAL YEAR 2022 PRELIMINARY BUDGET
FRIDAY, MARCH 12, 2021**

PREPARED BY
MICHAEL SCHNALL
CANDIDATE FOR NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
49TH DISTRICT, STATEN ISLAND

Good afternoon Chair Koo. My name is Michael Schnall and I am a candidate for New York City Council running to represent the 49th Council district, covering the north shore of Staten Island. Thank you for this opportunity to testify before the Committee on Parks & Recreation on the FY 2022 Preliminary Budget.

I am a proud alumnus of the New York City Council, first serving in the Council Finance Division, and then Legislative Director for former Council Member Yvette Clarke. I also served almost ten years at NYC Parks, having attended and testified at over 50 committee and budget hearings. And, most recently served five years at New York Road Runners, working with many of your colleagues to creating running and fitness opportunities for people of all ages and abilities across all 51 Council districts.

As someone who has worked on all sides of the City's budget battle, I know how important this budget process is for smart, thoughtful and informed decision-making, that inevitably impacts the health and well-being of this City's millions of residents. They are relying on the decisions being made in the halls of 250 Broadway and at City Hall to live healthy, meaningful and safe lives. Even though we're all working virtually and socially distanced, coming together and working for the betterment of every New Yorkers remains the primary role of every Council Member. I am a candidate for this very reason: I live to service those New Yorkers who are underserved and under-represented, and implore you to keep working until your last hour as Council Member to fulfill your mission of service to 8.4 million New Yorkers. I look forward to picking up the weighty responsibility, and carrying the torch forward in our never-ending work to improve our great city.

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I am testifying today in support of every effort the New York City Council can possibly make to provide funding to protect, preserve, enhance and care for our precious parks and open space. I support the Play Fair campaign, which was prescient in its efforts in 2019 recognizing that parks and open spaces would be (unknowingly to many of us) the mental health oases we needed to persevere through the pandemic. And I support every effort to maintain and enhance staffing levels, so the care and operations needed to maintain our parkland becomes a priority for a city that has historically disinvested in the needs of our Emerald Empire.

Parks are more important than ever to the health and well-being of every New Yorker. And the Council will hopefully not just support the City agency overseeing 1,700 parks, playground, and recreation facilities across the five boroughs, included in 30,000 acres of land, but also the dozens and dozens of park-related non-profit conservancies and friends of groups that pour their blood, sweat and tears into keeping parks, clean, green, healthy and safe. Council Members must realize that both capital and expense funding provided by this Council is only a part of the total recipe to successful parks: non-profits rely on donations and volunteers to fulfill their missions, as well as Council Member discretionary funding. Please be generous, support their efforts, and invest in the health and wellness of your communities.

I would be remiss in not mentioning two things. First, I want to acknowledge that Staten Island is the official “Borough of Parks” with the most parkland of all five boroughs. Our parks and open space are second to none, and a signature feature of our borough and why over 500,000 New Yorkers call Staten Island home. The north shore, where I live with my family and I’m seeking to represent, has an amazing diversity of parks and playgrounds. Every north shore resident deserves a safe, clean and beautiful park space, and as the next Council Member for the north shore, I will continue my commitment to NYC Parks to seek out every dollar possible to invest into our parks, playgrounds and open spaces.

Second, I want to say that while I will be deeply sad to see NYC Parks Commissioner Mitchell Silver leave the agency in June, I had the pleasure to work for him before leaving the agency, and have come to respect his empathetic approach to caring for parks, his visionary leadership on remaking parks for communities neglected for decades, and his commitment to equity and equality for all across a vast and diverse park system. And, I am deeply thankful for his friendship, his commitment to running, and look forward to running again with him soon.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I look forward to joining the Council in January 2022. I encourage Members and staff to stay safe, continue to wear a mask, socially distance, and get the vaccine when you become eligible.

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