

THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** March 31, 2021, 1:00 PM  
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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE  
RECONSTRUCTION OF BETSY HEAD PARK IN BROWNSVILLE, BROOKLYN**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Thank you, Renee. Thank you for all you have done to fight for Brooklyn and fight for Brownsville and make things happen. Let's thank Renee, everybody.

[Applause]

There is nothing more wonderful than making sure that resources flow to Brooklyn, and I say that as a proud Brooklynite – but especially making sure that fairness and justice dictate that Brownsville gets the resources it was so often deprived of in the past. And this is an important day because every time we invest in this community, we are righting the wrongs of the past and we're opening up the potential of the future particularly for young people.

And I want to thank – there are so many community leaders here from the community board and community organizations, thank you all. I want to say these things happen because people work for them, fight for them, believe in them. Your voices all matter, and it is great when you get to see the fruits of your labor. So, I want you to look around, look at your neighbors, give each other a round of applause. Thank you for all your good work.

[Applause]

So, this park – 106 years old. Marty is that right? 106 years old? All right. This is an example of the kind of thing we got to invest in if we're going to bring our city back. So, I talk about a recovery for all of us. A recovery for all of us does not mean just a recovery for Midtown, Manhattan. A recovery for all of us does not mean just those who were doing well before the pandemic, do well after the pandemic. A recovery for all of us means doing things differently.

Yes, this whole city, all five boroughs needs to come back, but it is also a transformative moment. Crisis is painful. We've lost people. Families have been going through so much struggle but it's also a time of transformation and rethinking our priorities, putting our money where our mouth is. So, here is an example the difference that will be made here by actually investing in the community and giving everyone who lives in the community the hope that they can live the lives that they deserve to live.

So, we've already seen a lot of investment here. \$7 million for the work that got completed last year, the basketball courts, the new skate park, play area. That's really good. That's already

happening. That's good news. But today we celebrate even bigger, better news. Phase two – \$23 million for Brownsville, \$23 million that will make an impact for this community.

[Applause]

For a beautiful field, for a running track, handball courts, everything that people need to really be outdoors and enjoy life, families enjoying time together, kids being healthy and having something positive. That's what this is all about.

Now, I was already highly motivated to see that we do these investments because I believe in equality and I believe that when we invest in parks, we're achieving a whole lot for our community. But we knew for a long time that parks investments also did not reflect this whole city. A lot of the most notable investments in parks went to the most famous parks and went to places where there was a lot of privilege already. But a lot of other parks in the five boroughs didn't get investment. This is something Mitch Silver and I worked on for a long time with the Anchor Park program – actually investing in community parks not just the famous name parks and making a difference.

So, I already felt a lot of motivation. But if I needed some extra motivation to invest in Brownsville, I got it from my dear friend, colleague for a long time, friend for a long time, my sister and often my conscience, Congressmember Yvette Clarke.

[Applause]

And Yvette and I have always seen the world very similarly, and we like to talk about when we were in the City Council together, we sat next to each other and we would talk during all the meetings and joke around and make fun of people, and they had to separate us just like – I felt like we were back in school. But Yvette has constantly called me. I want people to know this. I want you to feel this. A lot going on in New York City, I get a lot of calls from a lot of people. I constantly, over these last years, have gotten calls from Yvette Clarke saying, focus on Brownsville, invest in Brownsville parks, affordable housing, youth programs. She has been focused to the point of obsession but it's a noble obsession.

And so, a lot of what we celebrate today is that the Congress member has made this such a focus and this is one of a number of announcements we will be making in the year 2021 to benefit Brownsville and a lot of the credit goes to your Congress member. I welcome Yvette Clarke.

[Applause]

[...]

Brownsville Renaissance. I like the sound of that. And we're going to keep doing more and more throughout this year to build that renaissance. And I want you to know that leaders who make their voices heard, make a difference. And I've known Alicka Ampry-Samuel for a long time, and I saw, as so many people did, the promise in her. I was honored to support her when she ran for City Council. What she has done is to take that platform and make something happen. She

has been an extraordinary voice for public housing residents. She has been an extraordinary voice for changing the relationship and improving the relationship between police and community, for instituting real reforms, for focusing on new approaches that work like Cure Violence and the Crisis Management System. She's been a vibrant voice with solutions, and I honor her for that. So, today what we're doing is another part of the solution. Investment – anyone who tells you investment isn't part of the solution is someone who is not telling you the truth. We have to invest if we're going to create that renaissance. So, today is a part of that, and I welcome Council Member Alicka Ampry-Samuel.

[Applause]

[...]

Your presentation was vibrant.

[Laughter]

But a little mellower than some of our conversations. But they're all good. They're all for the same cause, right? To get something good done for the people. And I want to celebrate, as we prepare to bring Mitch Silver up – Mitch, now over the entire course of this administration really took the concept of equity and doing things differently and putting it into action. Again, it's something we keep learning. You look at how money is distributed, and you see a pattern of bias where the rich get richer. That has been the history, unfortunately, in this city. And what we've tried to do is redistribute. We've tried to change the patterns of where the money goes, and this moment now, especially, this transformative moment is where we have to do that in overdrive, in overdrive. And we can do in large measure thanks to that incredible stimulus that Yvette Clarke fought for, that's going to give us those tools we haven't always had in the past. But it's about where you focus.

So, when Mitch Silver became Parks Commissioner, we started thinking about changing the rules. And the whole idea of the Anchor Parks was to think about what people needed in communities, and to send the money where the actual need was. And I know that's been a labor of love for you, Mitch. And Mitch is nearing the end of his time as Parks Commissioner, but he has taken that vision and made it come alive all over the neighborhoods of this city. It doesn't get the attention it deserves because it's good news, but that redistribution is happening, and everyday New Yorkers are benefitting. My pleasure to bring forward our Parks Commissioner, Mitch Silver.

[Applause]

**Commissioner Mitchell Silver, Parks Department:** Thank you, Mayor de Blasio. Good afternoon, Brownsville.

[Applause]

I'm so excited to be here to see this transformed public space. Now, some of you live in the neighborhood. You knew what it looked like. This park was neglected for decades. There are some images of before that are on that wall and I cannot begin to tell you how overwhelmed I am to see what the space looks like today. It was in November of 2019 that we gathered to break ground at this site. So, it gives me great pleasure that all of us can see the fruits of our labor starting from that visioning meeting that the Council member talked about to ongoing meetings, thank you so much for supporting us.

Thank you again, Mayor. When we talked about the Anchor Park initiative, it was to make old parks new again. And that \$150 million investment, each park, one per borough would get \$30 million. And so, I was so delighted that it was an easy decision that Betsy Head Park was going to be that park for Brooklyn. Thank you, Congress Member Yvette Clarke for your leadership, City Council Member Alicka Ampry-Samuel. I'd also like to acknowledge the happiest borough commissioner in the City of New York and his entire team, Marty Maher.

[Applause]

Also, our community partners at Community Board 16 including the District Manager, Viola Greene-Walker.

[Applause]

And Chairperson of Community Board 16 Parks and Rec Committee, Deborah Williams.

[Applause]

And the Chairperson, Genese Morgan.

[Applause]

Also, of the 73rd Precinct, our partner to make sure this park is safe, we have Inspector Terrell Anderson. Thank you for being here.

[Applause]

Duane Kinnon, Chair of the Friends of Brownsville Park. And as you can see, this opened a few months ago and it still looks spectacular. We thank our staff and volunteers. Also, my good friends, you'll hear from shortly, Sheila Gordon and Dionne Grayman from We Run Brownsville.

[Applause]

Our entire capital team, but I want to give a special shout-out to Steve Rizzo. He's from [inaudible] Construction, probably I shouldn't say this but the best construction team for Parks and the City of New York, consistently delivers projects under budget and ahead of schedule. Steve, thank you.

[Applause]

We also have Therese Braddick, who is head of our Capital Division, Deputy Commissioner. And lastly, our Parks Enforcement Patrol, thank you for what you do throughout the pandemic and each and every day.

So, over the past year, really, we saw some of the darkest moments in our city and we learned so much about the value of our parks. I like to say that our city's park system is more than just our collective backyard. During COVID, it's become our sanctuary of sanity. Parks like Betsy Head, here, are in the heart of Brownsville and have been a vital part of this community as a hub for recreation and relaxation. And I couldn't have been more proud that in the midst of a pandemic, this community was able to come out and enjoy the \$30 million in upgrades that is now a world class park.

With the completion of phase two, as the Mayor said, you can now enjoy a new [inaudible] synthetic turf and a field, a running track, handball courts, basketball courts, sitting areas, and much more. And soon there will be a comfort station, behind me, that will be open to the public shortly. So, we would not be able to make this a reality if it wasn't for the Mayor's continued investment in improving parks that serve communities, that \$150 million after we complete all the Anchor Parks citywide will now give over 750,000 New Yorkers that live in those neighborhoods a world class park experience. It is our mission to increase equity and have a park system that reflects the needs and desires of all New Yorkers.

I have to reflect back for one quick second before I close. Both Dionne and Sheila invited me to run with We Run Brownsville a couple of summers ago, and I ran on this track. I was personally embarrassed by the potholes. I've never seen potholes on a track. And we were weaving through and as we were talking and running, it broke my heart that this is what this community had to endure for generations. And now to come back and see the track look like this, it gives my heart joy.

And the day I came out there, which is so powerful about running, and it wasn't just – it was multiple generations. There were grandmothers and mothers and children that are here coming together to run, that that's the impact that parks have. It has a generational impact just by coming to these public spaces. So, I am so pleased, the upgrades here at Betsy Head and I am so honored that this will now impact both present and future generations. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

**Mayor:** I want to join Mitch in thanking all the folks who keep our parks safe and our community safe. Thanks to everyone, Parks Enforcement, for the great work they do. Thanks to the members of the NYPD. And thank you to our precinct commander for doing great work on the ground. And a special thank you to folks, again – I honor and respect what they do and I've been trying to spread the word and invest in this movement and it is going to have more and more to say about the future of this city and a safer future. Our colleagues from the Cure

Violence movement, Crisis Management System, thank you for all you do. Let's give them a round of applause, everybody.

[Applause]

Last but not least, that's a good phrase, isn't it? Because no one should be least when speaking about a brand-new park. Everyone has something good to say. And I love the name, We Run Brownsville, and I love the idea of all sorts of folks being healthy together and enjoying this beautiful community. And thank you for all you have done as President and Cofounder of the organization. My pleasure to introduce Dionne Grayman.

[Applause]

[...]

Thank you so much, Dionne. And everybody, we've all learned today, great things can happen when people get involved. We've all learned about the three-lane incident and how it turned into four lanes. That's a great civics lesson right there. But I also want to leave with you, if anyone ever accuses you of being too loud or demanding too much or being too insistent, just say to them, 'Oh, no, I'm just being vibrant.' Thank you, everybody.

[Applause]

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