

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams, NYC Parks Announce Over 100 Projects Starting Construction This Spring

March 13, 2022

Commissioner Sue Donoghue, Department of Parks and Recreation: Good morning, everyone and welcome on this beautiful sunny crisp Sunday to Saratoga Park. Before I begin, I want to acknowledge a few people who are here with us this morning: our great Mayor of the City of New York Eric Adams; a longtime partner and great park advocate, Community Board 3 District Manager Henry Butler; and we've got a full force of great park staff who are with us this morning as well. Our new First Deputy Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa is here. Our Deputy Commissioner for Capital Projects Therese Braddick. Our Deputy Commissioner, Chief Operating Officer Mark Focht is here. Our Brooklyn Borough Commissioner Martin Maher. I want to also recognize Tiffany Briery from the Trust for Public Land. Good morning, Tiffany. And Chris Del Dante from Dante Construction – our contractor is also here.

Commissioner Donoghue: As we all know, parks and playgrounds have always been vital to our health and well-being and never more so than during the last two years of this pandemic. In New York City, parks are our backyards. But in the past two years, they've also become our sanctuaries. They were the places where we'd meet our friends and families. They were our outdoor classrooms. Where we celebrated and had birthday parties and family reunions. And they were our summer vacation destinations when we weren't able to travel. As we move forward toward recovery, New Yorkers know how vital it is to have high-quality, open space, and we, at the Parks Department, want to build on that great momentum. We're dedicated to getting projects done on time, with an emphasis on getting communities involved in the design of their park, what they look like and how they're going to function.

Commissioner Donoghue: Under this new administration, we are also deeply committed to building equitable and sustainable parks in communities in need. Every community deserves a park they can be proud of, and it shouldn't depend on what zip

code or how much money you make. We also know at the Parks Department that parks play a vital role in protecting us against the effects of climate change. That's why we're focused on building sustainable, resilient parks, using recycled materials, incorporating stormwater management to help reduce flooding, and planting and greening wherever possible. Because you see the impacts of that greening in a place like this and the beautiful trees surrounding us in Saratoga Park. And it starts right here in Bed Stuy.

Commissioner Donoghue: That's why we are so excited to have the mayor here and to have all of our community support. We're already underway on a full renovation of this community playground that you see behind me. In this project, we're going to make the playground more accessible, make sure it fits the needs of the community, and that the design speaks to input we receive directly from the people who use this park the most. That's what's so important to us. So that's why this morning, we are so excited to have the mayor speak and share with you our plan for our great parks across the city. But first, we're fortunate to have a very local resident and great partner in Henry Butler, district manager of CB3 who can speak firsthand about the value of playgrounds and parks in their local communities. So, Henry.

[Applause]

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Commissioner Donoghue: Thank you, Henry. We're so thrilled to have you and your son here. It shows how great parks are in terms of helping kids to grow, for sure. And then without further ado, I want to announce our great Mayor of the City of New York Eric Adams.

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you. No, I am just so excited about the partnership of Sue and Iris, because they bring the combination. Sue and I have done some great projects together at Prospect Park. I was just looking at the two of them when we decided how do we bring the right combination. I look at the evolution of Prospect Park. Historically, one side of the park was not receiving the same level of attention and Sue came in and just developed a whole park and equalized that. And everywhere I went in the Bronx, all they did was talk about you, Iris. So we have a great team here. And you won't find a park official that loves their job more than Marty. He probably has parks pajamas or something. He loves his job, and you need that energy. And the park employees, our safety officers that are here, the contractors, those who trim the trees.

Mayor Adams: But nothing really touched me as much as what Henry stated. You know, you're dead on. Oftentimes, we look at the parks and we don't understand what takes place here. I remember when mom passed away, I went down to Brooklyn Bridge Park and I would just sit there and look at the water and just have a moment of reflection. And even during COVID, if we didn't have our parks... I think the park saved a lot of marriages, you know. Because locked up in those doors in an apartment all the time... Being able to walk through the park, running through the park, tough decisions inside the park. I talked to my son about going away to school and why it was important to go to college. It was in the park when I sat down and had conversation with family members as we planned the events, you know. These spaces are so crucial because we are of nature and part of nature and we want to be connected to nature.

Mayor Adams: Living in a brick, metal – in a city where you have so many buildings and construction, green spaces play a major role in seeing that young man at 16 can talk about the days he spent with his dad inside the park. Or having the baby in the background – I heard the baby, you know, talking and playing. Or walking our dogs, and, you know, just connecting with ourselves. Parks are the places, you know. Many days in Prospect Park I sat down and just meditated, did breathing exercises, walked, my bike. Is the great equalizer. I don't care if you are a building billionaire or a plumber that rocks inside the home of a billionaire, when you come into a park, all of that is gone. You have to sit on the same grass, you're looking at the same trees, you're experiencing the same experiences, and it's just a great equalizer for our city. So we want to get this right. And I want to thank Sue and her entire team that is part of the announcement that we're doing today. Because it shows that we're moving in the right direction and what we're doing.

Mayor Adams: And focus on how we're doing it. So we want the parks to look great, but we also want the people who renovate the parks to be employed so that they can live in the communities around the parks. They want to make sure diversity is there. We want to make sure our parks are safe. Do you know that areas where there are parks are clearly a safe place in the city. All of this is connected and far too long we ignore that connection. So today's a great day for our city. It's a great day for our parks. This is an important pathway as we revitalize our city, as we come out of COVID.

Mayor Adams: My Saratoga Park. You know, I'm a Bed Stuy guy too. I spent a lot of times, you know, riding my bike through this park right here on Broadway. When I was a kid on Gates Avenue and I looked at Broadway out there – that's where Sammy Davis Jr. used to perform. Little did I know, no, that's not the Broadway area. But it's still my

Broadway. You know, so this park is not a luxury, it's a necessity. It's a healthy place to build community regardless of your zip code, your ethnicity. Regardless of the language you speak, you should have a park where you can enjoy the lifetime memories.

Mayor Adams: Today, we're breaking ground on a \$2.2 million refurbishment of Saratoga Park. A nice piece of change going into this park, and it's including new play equipment, like swings and type play areas, so babies can enjoy the space, as well as new lighting, ground games, restoration of the surrounding lawn. Some of it you're seeing here. It's a refurbishing of a great park space and \$2.2 million is going into that. But we're also announcing today the groundbreaking of a 100 park projects beginning construction this spring of \$417 million capital investment projects that were paused during the pandemic. Our lives were placed on hold. COVID hijacked not only our personal spaces, but our green spaces. And we're saying today as we cycle out of COVID that it's time to get back into our green and our open spaces, and we're going to spend \$470 million in doing so.

Mayor Adams: And here's the thing, 50 percent of the projects will be awarded to minority and women owned businesses. You know, 50 percent. Each project will employ an average of 40 workers. The project would include sustainability features such as LED lighting. We're making – we're looking at our environment. As we build parks for a great environment, we're going to take care of our environment. We'll also have rain gardens and planting trees, as well as, on site, stone water capture and use of recycled, resilient materials. Real smart designs as we make our green spaces grow. We're going to restore areas that needed help for so long and you know it. You walk through your parks and you're seeing that these areas must be refurbished. And that's what we're going to do.

Mayor Adams: New Yorkers can benefit from and experience a beautiful park throughout our entire city. And it's the tools of equity what we're looking at. The goal is to end the inequalities that we've witnessed for years. We know that there's been a focus for the most part and decentralizing resources in certain parks in our city. You don't see it and now those days are over. We're going to bring the great equalizers because every community deserves a great part. And 62 percent of the parks that we are refurbishing would be in underserved communities. So we're going off the beaten path. We're going to create new access points for New Yorkers and bringing more people into green spaces.

Mayor Adams: Our parks are lifelines. They are crucial, as we say over and over again, for our physical, mental, and our emotional stability. And I'm happy that we're doing this in an equitable way. So New York City is back and parks are a symbol of the recovery. We're going to break ground on parks today, for the parks of tomorrow and our future. So future generations can get together and talk about the great days they have with their children as they played in the park spaces.

Mayor Adams: We say this over and over again, it has become a model, but it's a lifestyle. It's not just a slogan, it's a belief. This is an administration that is going to GSD. We're going to get stuff done. We're going to leave our print on our city. Our city is going to be a better, safer, cleaner place to raise healthy children and families. But you have a role also. As New Yorkers, it's imperative that we break out of our boundaries. We have to cross pollinate. This park would not be significant if we just had one tree or one type of plant. It is a place of enjoyment because of the cross pollination of flowers. It's time for us to cross pollinate as New Yorkers. We want to stop hate crimes – our anti-Asian violence, antisemitism, anti-LGBTQ+ communities. And we want to stop that. It starts with us.

Mayor Adams: We can't continue to live in a city where we are isolated. If all we know are people who look like us, talk like us, walk like us, look, listen to the same music, eat the same food, do the same things, that's a Shakespearean tragedy. It's time for us to live the love affair of being in a city as diverse as New York. 47 percent of New Yorkers speak a language other than English at home. This is a great moment for all of us. It's an excellent experiment of human existence. And let's use these parks to introduce our children to children of another community.

Mayor Adams: You watch babies, they play, they enjoy each other, they don't ask what culture you're from. We humans have screwed this darn thing up. Let these children enjoy each other and enjoy the diversity. Not only the diversity in the plants and trees in parks, but the diversity of the human experience. That's what these parks must represent. So we can raise children that won't attack each other because of their culture, their skin color, the language they speak. They all understand that we're all in this together. That's the investment and seeds. We must plan today to have a brighter future for tomorrow. So my team at Parks, I want to thank you so much for what you're doing. Every day that you go to work, understand that you're not only grooming the parks, but you're grooming our future. And we can do it together. Thank you. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

Audience: [Inaudible]

Mayor Adams: You're right. You're right. And you're right. Thank you. Listen, you're right. Kyrie can play tomorrow. Get vaccinated. Good. I love New York and hecklers, man. I come out of City Hall and people outside are protesting and I say, "Well, it's great to be in New York."

Question: Mr. Mayor, you promised during the campaign, you committed to 1 percent of the city budget going to the park system. You know, obviously, that was not the case in the budget you've proposed. So there's been some criticism of that. Just wondering, are you still planning to do that? And why wasn't it in this budget?

Mayor Adams: Yeah, we were at – we did have that percentage. As you know, COVID threw us all off our game. All of our agencies, for the most part, including Parks, had to go in and do a 3 percent [inaudible]. We are pushing to get more capital dollars. But you know, this is early. This is the first budget, preliminary budget. And the goal is to get to that 1 percent. I'm a big believer in parks. Sue will tell you how much money I put in parks, and Marty, when I was the borough president. So we want to get there. But you know, COVID really hit us with dealing with economic crises in our city. And all of the agencies had to reflect on how we're going to spend, but we're getting there. I'm confident that we are.

Question: Just wondering if you talked to any victims of the stabbings. Any update on the guy that did it?

Mayor Adams: Yes. We reached out to both individuals while they were in the hospital. You know, we're really praying for them. Thank God they appear to be non-life threatening injuries. And the goal is to catch him. We know who he is and the police department will apprehend him. That was an unfortunate situation. Safe work spaces is crucial, and you should not have to deal with that violence of – because you were not allowed inside the museum.

Question: Any update on the homeless shootings?

Mayor Adams: You know, it broke my heart. If anyone saw the video of what happened last night. We responded to the scene and to the precinct. This was an intentional murder. This individual approached the two men one at a time. You see him looking around, making sure no one was around. Kicking the homeless person to make sure they were not asleep, and just assassinated him. Just something that you would not imagine would take place in our city. Thank God, I believe, one of the homeless gentlemen – our neighbor, our brother – I believe that he's alive today because he woke up after he heard the first gunshot and started yelling, and the second person did not. I mean, he stood over him and shot him in his head for no reason at all, but being homeless. And so we will catch him. The detectives are going to investigate and we will catch him but we are also mobilizing on the streets to, you know, notify our homeless to try to get them in shelter, those who want to do so. And not giving them the resources that they deserve, but being homeless should not turn into a homicide. And I want to catch this guy bad.

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