

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams, NYC Parks, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Celebrate \$18.2 Million Remediation of Red Hook Ball Fields

April 20, 2022

Commissioner Sue Donoghue, Department of Parks: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome. I'm New York City Parks Commissioner Sue Donoghue, and I want to welcome everyone to the Red Hook Recreation Area. I could not be more excited to be here during Earth Week to celebrate the culmination of years of work to revitalize these ball fields and make them cleaner and healthier for this community. First of all, I want to thank all of our speakers who have joined us today, our esteemed Mayor of New York City Eric Adams. All right, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regional Administrator Lisa Garcia is here. We are so pleased to be joined by Congress Member Nydia Velázquez, as well as our local council member, Alexa Avilés. We're so pleased to be joined by the deputy director of the New York City Mayor's Office of Sustainability, Kizzy Charles-Guzman.

Commissioner Donoghue: I would be remiss if I didn't also take note of all the other wonderful partners who are with us today who helped make this become a reality. I want to call out the NYCHA Tenants Association, East and West, Ms. Brown and Ms. Marshall. I want to call out the 76th Precinct Executive Officer Doug Moody is here. NYCHA Housing Officer Patel. So many great teams and youth organizations behind me, and I want to recognize the Bonnie Youth League who's here who uses these fields, the Bonnies. It really does take a village to make something like this happen, and we're so thrilled to have you all here. With the reopening of these fields, we're celebrating an act of environmental justice. It's about writing the environmental wrongs of our past and ensuring that every neighborhood has access to high quality, healthy and safe parks.

Commissioner Donoghue: It admittedly took us some time to get here, but we are so proud to have seen this great project through. In New York, our parks are not just a luxury, they are a necessity. We rely on them for health and fitness. They are where we gather and make memories, places like this, where people learn to throw a ball or what it means to be part of a team. The pandemic highlighted only so much, how much more and how important they are to all New Yorkers. When Parks and the EPA found contaminants in the soil here in Red Hook, the remains of a lead smelting plant that used to be at this site, we knew we had to make the tough choice to temporarily close these fields. With support and guidance from the EPA, we began an extensive remediation and reconstruction project to protect members of this community. Today, we're happy to report that these fields are safer and better than ever, and they're ready right in time for this year's baseball season.

Commissioner Donoghue: After undergoing an \$18 million reconstruction, fields five through eight now boast a new synthetic turf field for a variety of sports, new dugouts, rain gardens, ADA compliant ramps, and plantings to beautify this area. We're continuing our work and commitment here to ensure that all the fields here at Red Hook are safe. Three more reconstruction projects in the Red Hook Recreation Area are currently moving ahead with ball field nine and soccer field two behind me, expected to reopen this summer. I know when this entire project is complete, our fields will be filled with passionate players like the ones standing behind us, anxious newbies, people cheering and cheering and more for generations to come.

Commissioner Donoghue: I want to thank the community here at Red Hook for their support and patience with this project. Let us all be reminded of the importance of caring for our natural environment, establishing safe spaces for all, and improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers and for all humans. Before I turn it over to our speakers, I must give a big shout out to our Parks team who've worked so hard behind the scenes to help get us to this point. I want to start by recognizing our Deputy Commissioner for Capital Projects Therese Braddick. Yay, Therese. Our Brooklyn Borough Commissioner Marty Maher, our design manager, Kevin Hogan, and our construction director, Allaire O'Connor. Thank you all. Now, please join me in welcoming EPA Regional Administrator, Lisa Garcia.

Lisa Garcia, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regional Administrator: Hello. Hello. Buenas tardes. It is great to be out here on this new field. Good afternoon, Mayor, congresswoman, councilwoman, and executive director for climate and EJ at the mayor's office, Kizzy, and thank you so much commissioner. It's just wonderful to be out

here celebrating the partnership to clean this site up. We know that legacy sites such as the Columbia lead smelting site, which was here, take a real concerted effort to tackle and clean up. It really takes the coordination at this site with the City of New York, Parks Department especially. I just want to say that EPA is so thankful for the work that happened here from the testing of the soil, finding out what levels of lead, and unfortunately having to close the site, but really even expanding the work to find out what other areas we can clean up. While we're celebrating this site is finally ready for reuse, we know that construction and cleanup continues around the area. It's just really great to be able to celebrate this.

Garcia: The journey to clean up these sites and the coordination takes a long, long time. These ball fields first began with the collaborative effort between EPA, New York City Parks to sample small areas here, and the results showed those high levels of lead that we are talking about in several fields. Ball field seven sits right on top of the former Columbia smelting plant, and beginning in 2015, the ball fields five and eight were closed to the public. Starting in 2019, New York City Parks began the cleanup of ball fields five and eight under the supervision and partnership with EPA. The work was not easy. New York City Parks installed a new protective soil barrier, which we are standing on today, so now it's protected as the commissioner said. The ball fields have new trees, new plants, drainage features, which I know doesn't make sense, but capturing stormwater runoff, which also helps tackle some of our climate change issues.

Garcia: In December, these ball fields were open to the public as work was beginning to be completed. We're just really happy the completion of the work is done because as we know, there is no safe level of lead. That was the most important thing is that the kids and the families in this community, even though we had to shut it down, were protected from the contamination here. We came in, partnered with everybody, cleaned it up, and today we're celebrating this wonderful, beautiful new field on a great day, so exactly like everyone's saying, the kids and the families can once enjoy this area. I just want to say, thank you so much from the US EPA. I also want to thank the EPA staff just quickly, Joe, Margaret and Natalie, especially for the work that they did here, cleaning up and the long effort for many, many years to get us here. Thank you everyone for the partnership and let's go play ball.

Commissioner Donoghue: Yes, exactly, and thank you Lisa. Next up, I'm pleased to welcome Congressmember Nydia Velázquez.

Congressmember Nydia Velázquez: Thank you, commissioner, and thank you, all of you for being here. This is for you. This is for our community, but most particularly for our children, and today we are making a statement. When we talk about systemic inequities, this is how we do it. Every inch and every part of our city, particularly in underserved communities, we are here to say no more. Every, every New Yorker, every human being has the right to safe and safety, especially when it comes to the health of our communities. Commissioner and Mr. Mayor, Administrator Lisa Garcia, and her team, Mayor Adams and his team, and of course our beloved commissioner of Brooklyn, Marty Maher, thank you for all the work, Council Member Alexa Avilés. The statement we are making today is that strong community engagement, strong community engagement and agency collaboration is essential for Red Hook's sustainable future, and indeed for the future of all communities across New York City.

Congressmember Velázquez: I am just so happy, so happy that we are here. As the commissioner, Lisa Garcia said, we cannot make a commitment that we have removed all the contaminants, but we can make a statement that we will feel safe, that our children can come out of this pandemic where so many people have been depressed, wanted to socialize here, this is for you, and I am just so happy. Once again, this is what it takes, all levels of government telling our community that we care, that we care. Let's play ball. And he doesn't have any jersey.

Mayor Eric Adams: Just—bee off you.

[Laughter]

Congressmember Velázquez: I have my uniform, but Mr. Mayor, I don't know about you. I have my Mets jersey in my office. Okay.

Commissioner Donoghue: Thank you so much Congressmember Velazquez. We're so thrilled to have you here and celebrating with us. I'm now pleased to welcome our City Council member, Alexa Avilés.

Council Member Alexa Avilés: Oh my goodness. How we doing today? Amazing. It's a beautiful day. I want to first thank Congressional Representative Nydia Velazquez. You have been here struggling hard with our community for so, so long, and it is because of your persistent leadership and commitment to not taking no for an answer that we are all here today, so thank you. Thank you. To our federal partners, our EPA Regional

Administrator Lisa Garcia, thank you so much. To the whole EPA team, thank you so much. To my predecessors, right, who were here in the struggle, I get to come in at the end, although the work is not done. Right? We have a lot more fields we need to work on. To the Mayor's team, to the Parks team, Commissioner Donoghue, I look so forward to working with you and to all the Parks Department, Parky, ho ho. Yes, and lastly to the Red Hook community.

Council Member Avilés: This community is resilient. It is beautiful. It is strong, and it is tough as nails. Red Hook suffers no fools. If you think you're going to shine them, you are in for a different lesson. This has been a long, long fight. The houses, as we know is in the middle of a resiliency project, but still there is so much work that needs to happen in the people's apartments where lead in Red Hook houses is higher than anywhere else in any public housing across the city. We have a lot of work to do. I just wanted you to know that I'm committed to that work. I'm committed to seeing it through, and I know our community we'll make sure to hold us all accountable so that we get it done because they deserve, they deserve a field, facilities, services that reflect the dignity and worth and amazingness that they are, and I'm committed to making sure that gets done.

Council Member Avilés: I thank you for your partnership because we have more fields to go, and that includes our Red Hook Recreation Center, which is critical to our community. Thank you so much, and yeah, let's play ball.

Commissioner Donoghue: Thank you so much Council Member Avilés. Finally, it is my great privilege and I'm so proud to welcome our great mayor of New York City, Eric Adams.

Mayor Adams: Thank you. Thank you so much. I remember a few years ago when we stated we were going to have to close the ball fields. It was about seven years, and the congresswoman pushing and saying, we got to get this done. We have to make sure not only do we deal with the lead issue, but we need to bring a quality product here so that the people and families of this community could enjoy it. I remember speaking with Ms. Lillian, and meeting with her and the team and walking through Red Hook together as we deal with some of the issues that the councilwoman is talking about, how do we bring quality to nature in a real way and why it is so important what the congresswoman attempted to do, and bringing in \$35 billion to our city. We have to really make sure that

money comes in so we don't put a bandaid on a condition that has generations of denying the right support that's needed in NYCHA.

Mayor Adams: As the mayor of the City of New York, we are committed to doing that with all of our partners. This is a great day for Red Hook. It's a great day for Red Hook. After a seven year wait, these young people have waited for seven years to see this field come back and see the type of quality fields that you see in other parts of the city. You have not been denied. A Red Hook ball field is back. It is back, and we're going to ensure the other ball fields receive the support that they deserve. We are cutting the ribbon today on ball fields, five and eight. We're going to continue to expand with our amazing commissioner and the person that just loves his job so much, Marty.

Mayor Adams: He just loves putting out fields. The clean soil, the drainage, the quality that the families deserve, and this is only phase one. With the remediation and reconstruction, we're going to push through the other phases and get the quality that these families deserve. I want to thank EPA. Number one, when they identified the problem, they could have just said we're just going to wait to retest, retest, retest. No. They said there's a problem here. Let's not deny it. Let's address it, and let's correct it. Thank you so much for what you have done and will continue to do. You're right commissioner, Parks are not a luxury. It's a necessity. In fact, it's the great equalizer because when your son or daughter plays ball on this field, it doesn't matter what you do occupationally. We're all the same. We're all kicking the soccer field. We all want our times at bats, as Bonnies, or we all want an opportunity to enjoy this field.

Mayor Adams: There is probably no other place in the public domain that's a great equalizer like a park, and park equity must be important. That's what we did at Prospect Park with Sue Donoghue, and that's what we're going to do all across the city. The only park in the city is not called Central Park. All of our parks matter. Every community, the parks matter. That's what we're going to focus on in this administration is restoring areas that have been denied for so many years. Right here in Red Hook, we're creating this new space and access points for families and memories to be made. These young people called Bonnies, and the soccer team, look at that diversity. Look at that diversity. The relationships they're developing today, when they're at bat, when they kick the soccer ball, when they learn how to win and lose, when they watch their parents on the sideline forgetting that this is only a game and they got to calm them down, these relationships are going to last a lifetime.

Mayor Adams: I am still in touch with those who I played little league ball with and the relationships that you have together. I'm excited for this project. I want to thank all that are involved. This is what our communities look like. This is what our communities can become, and I want to join the narrative from everyone else, let's play ball. Thank you very much.

Commissioner Donoghue: Yes, exactly.

Question: All right, a little bit off topic, mayor, but it's sort of related because I want to talk a little bit about what we call New York's five o'clock shadow, which is every afternoon, large plastic garbage bags show up on the sidewalk, restricting pedestrian and access and making it harder to move around. Now, your sanitation commissioner...[inaudible]

Question: We want to move faster on containerization of trash. The Department of Transportation commissioner said the other day that he's just waiting for City Hall to...

Mayor Adams: Question. Question. We don't need... I'm getting ready to bounce, guys. So you need to talk to your colleague, get through the question. All right?

Question: Okay. As the get-stuff-done mayor, when will you commit to containerizing trash and getting it out of pedestrians' way?

Mayor Adams: Yes. Next question.

Question: I was wondering, do you still think zero waste by 2030 is possible? And what are your plans for meeting it if so?

Mayor Adams: Zero... We're going to keep pushing through, listen, we're dealing with an economic crisis right now. And so we have to shift on how we make sure we look at those areas that we want to accomplish. And I think it is possible. We have to roll out a real plan, year by year, to analyze where we are, are we meeting our targets, where do we have to push further? And so I think it is possible and we going to fight to get there.

Question: Mayor, when did you file an extension for your taxes? And second question, you pledged this morning to invest more in the cannabis industry in New York City. Can

you explain a little bit more about this and how you hope the cannabis industry will grow in New York City?

Mayor Adams: Oh yes. Already filed that extension. That's one.

Question: When? When did you file the extension?

Mayor Adams: Days ago, probably I think Friday.

Mayor Adams: Second, the cannabis, what happened with the cannabis industry, which we are concerned about, is that those who were impacted the most by heavy-handed policing around marijuana, around being arrested, have police records. So it's important for us that the SBS goes out, use the money that we're allocating to go out, encourage people about the businesses, how to start up, how to navigate the complexities of ensuring our legacy project actually reach people on the ground. That's crucial for me. Also, I want to look at those who are arrested, fix credit reports, have job training. We need to look at making people whole who experience the over-aggressive, heavy-handed police practices around marijuana. And that is what these dollars of going to go to, is going to help people build out and understand the infrastructure of going after the cannabis business.

Question: You had on your schedule this morning that you were going to attend the wake for the 12-year-old who was shot, and you didn't appear. Was there something that came up? What caused the change in the schedule?

Mayor Adams: Yeah, I actually... We were in Brooklyn, en route, about 10 minutes away. Because I wanted to personally give her \$500 because funerals are expensive. So I wanted to personally give her the money to help out during this time. I had a 10:00 AM meeting with civil rights leaders around gun violence. That meeting was canceled twice already, and the civil rights meeting. So we thought we could do both. I didn't want to illegally use lights and sirens and break the law. We thought we could do both. When I saw that I couldn't get there in time, I just wired the money to ... I went on GoFundMe and gave the money to the family. And I went to the civil rights meeting. My on the ground CAU team was there. Pastor Monroe has been with the family throughout this whole endeavor, and I'm going to reach out to the mother later, and I'm sure she's traumatized by this whole incident.

Question: The taxes for a second, if I could. You keep talking about how there's no legal requirement for you to release the documents. But Mayor Koch did and Mayor Dinkins did and Mayor Giuliani and Bloomberg and de Blasio all did. Why shouldn't you hold yourself to the same standard?

Mayor Adams: I spent two days talking out my taxes. This is day three. And one thing I could promise you, it's not going to be a day three. I already talked about it. I answered all the questions. That's a wrap. I am not going to spend days talking about the same things when I'm watching babies being shot in the city, I'm watching people fighting for housing. I'm watching all of these crises. So this may be news to others, but it's not news to these folks here. I have a city to run. Two days I entertained your questions, and it's not going to be a third day. I will release my taxes, as I stated. And I look forward to saying... Showing everyone how much money I paid in this city in taxes.

Question: Thank you Mayor. Yesterday, I asked you about the letter from the Manhattan U.S. Attorney's Office, submitted as part of the Rikers court case. They said you hadn't gotten the chance to read it at that point. Have you gotten the chance to read it now? What's your response? What do you think of the idea of placing Rikers on the federal receivership?

Mayor Adams: We're going to meticulously go through the letter and see. I reached out to the commissioner. I spoke to my chief council. And I stated that we are working in partnership with the U.S. Attorney's Office. I'm happy they have new leadership there, the first African American in the Southern district in the history. So we look forward to looking at the letter, finding out if there's a communication problem, and work with the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Mayor Adams: Our goal is to create an environment that people who are incarcerated is treated with dignity, employees are treated with dignity, and those who want to visit their loved ones are treated in dignity. And so we look forward to that. And if there was a communication problem, we're going to rectify that. But let's be clear. I said this yesterday, and I'm going to say it again, the crisis of Rikers did not start January 1, 2022. The crisis with Rikers have been happening for decades, decades. And so if you now say, "Okay, Eric Adams is mayor, and now all of a sudden..." I know it's hard to believe I've only been mayor for four months. I know that's hard to believe, but I've only been here for four months. Decades of problems in Rikers, we are now... Have the right

commissioner, the right team, and we're going to move to fix those problems. And I look forward to being a partner with the U.S. Attorney in accomplishing that.

Question: I heard you say that you would rather see federal leadership at Rikers, because there's been such an extensive crisis there.

Mayor Adams: And I say, all I say is give me a chance. Give me a chance. We have witnessed how others have failed. Now give me a chance. Let's work together. And that's my message to all those who are critiquing Rikers. With four months in, give me an opportunity. And why give me an opportunity? Because the people on Rikers, they look like me. They look like me. And I want them to be able to serve their time with dignity, come home, and be productive citizens in our society. And I'm committed to doing that. We have a lot of people who have been running Rikers. This is the first Latino commissioner. We have a lot of people who are running Rikers that don't look like the inmates in Rikers. And so now you have a mayor that looks like the inmates in Rikers. And you know what? I'm the only mayor in history that once sat in a jail cell when I was arrested as a child. So I know what they're going through. Okay?

Mayor Adams: Thank you.