



EL PUENTE
COMMUNITY CENTER



Elizabeth Adams

Budget & financing

For decades New York City's annual budget for NYC Parks has been about one-half of one percent. Parks advocates are calling for the City to commit to a goal of 1% of its overall budget for maintenance and operations (roughly \$900 million). Do you support this goal? How will you ensure that funds are equitably distributed so that parks in lower income neighborhoods of color are safe and well-maintained?

I strongly support this goal. North Brooklyn has a long history of environmental injustice and a lack of needed green space -- fighting for parks and green space is core to my platform and why I'm running.

This Mayor has shown his complete lack of interest in our city's parks. New York City's Parks budget is just .5%, and even saw a decrease when New Yorkers need parks most, while other major cities fund parks well over 1%. Overall, we need a complete shift in prioritization of our public space that prioritizes access, clean air, and green space. As Council Member, I would push to significantly increase investment in our parks and work with other agencies to expand public access to open space where parks are not available, such as through the Design for Public Space.

Park maintenance is core to community wellbeing and health and NYC should be prioritizing job creation in communities that have borne the brunt of environmental racism. I will prioritize discretionary fund allocations for projects that center environmental justice, and will work to make sure Council district funds are equitable when it comes to Greener NYC initiatives, litter baskets, and more.

In an effort to create more park space, the city has relied on privately-owned public spaces (POPS) in recent years. What do you think about these efforts? What are advantages and drawbacks of this approach? Do you have intentions to reduce or expand these types of spaces in North Brooklyn?

Relying on private development for public space solutions is complicated and often fraught. POPS have often been used to allow for increased development with the promise of more available and well maintained public space, but have raised real concerns about accessibility and inclusion. A 2017 report by Scott Stringer found that about half of POPS actually obstructed or restricted entry to the public in violation of rules, and many lack programming to make spaces feel inclusive to everyone. North Brooklyn has waterfront

development POPS that are often not used by the public and feel impersonal. Usage could be improved with partnerships with local organizations and groups, like schools, looking for outdoor programming.

During tight budget times, creative approaches are important, but public access and environmental inclusion needs to be at the forefront, which is why I support city efforts to utilize publicly owned space for green space needs.

Parks and open space have inherent public benefit. How do you plan to address inequities created resulting from decisions that have prioritized real estate interests?

Private development has dictated the terms for environmental planning in North Brooklyn for too long and we have seen decades of environmental abuse and neglect in communities of color as a result. We have a responsibility to ensure our environmental policies and our climate action plan occur within the frameworks of racial and social justice. Our city's marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by the effects of climate change, and if we fail to secure a greener, more just future for all of us, then we have failed in our mission to rehabilitate our environment.

More than ever, we need open green space and expanded waterfront access and I would push for funding for local environmental groups that help clean up our waterways for shoreline access and serve as a natural storm barrier and that invest in communities most directly impacted. We should also utilize public land along Newtown Creek for permeable surfaces, public parks, creek access, and environmental restoration in some of the areas most damaged by industry and most inaccessible historically to the public. Public land is our frontline infrastructure and should be the proving ground to the community that this can work.

Maintenance, repair & renovation

Our city's park maintenance backlog is decades-long and is most pronounced in smaller open spaces in less affluent sections of our community. What's your plan to prioritize long overlooked and under-resourced spaces in North Brooklyn? How do you intend to engage with residents and community groups on this plan?

My priorities as Council Member would be to significantly increase investment in our parks' maintenance and work with other agencies to expand public access to open space where parks are not available, such as through the Design for Public Space's El Space Toolkit. Regarding operations, I would like to see a shift in management that has been top down, to empower and support local groups like North Brooklyn Parks Alliance and Greenpoint parks stewardship groups that know the needs of the neighborhood and how to adapt and grow to serve the community. The network of Friends groups should be empowered by Parks with greater funding to lead more decision-making.

I am a strong advocate for participatory budgeting and I would push for a more robust citywide expansion of participatory budgeting and participatory governance to have more residents and community groups at the table for identifying and funding under-resourced spaces.

What is your position on community-driven efforts to create more open and green space (such as BQGreen [big], Nuestro Aire/ Our Air Action Platform, or Newtown Creek Street ends [small])? If elected, how will you champion these solutions?

I would work to create community planning around public space and seize opportunities for expanded access through parks under bridges at the Pulaski and Williamsburg bridges, as well as street end parks and the acquisition of land on Newtown Creek, and I would use community-led partnerships to implement Make Meeker Move and BQGreen. As we recover from the pandemic, and consider how we redesign our space, now is the time to build a network of connection between green spaces in the district and safe corridors.

An investment in open space in neighborhoods that lack parks also creates opportunities for environmental economic growth, and moves us on the urgently needed path away from car-centric infrastructure toward more people-first planning. New protected bike and busways ensure cyclists and pedestrians have safer commuting options; and making the city's Open Streets program permanent would keep our communities vibrant and help our local businesses thrive in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

How would you reform the public process, with respect to scoping and design of park space, so that it is meaningful, includes awareness raising around major health risks in our communities, and residents and community groups are deeply and inclusively engaged over the long-term?

I would work with residents and the Community Board to support environmental and green space requirements for rezonings. North Brooklyn is home to multiple Superfund sites and brownfields and yet development has often not been required to contribute to the area's environmental needs. We have had rezoning after rezoning and the development that has gone up has not factored in infrastructure needs of green space, transportation and public needs, or done any resiliency planning. Frankly, it is irresponsible governance, and I would start with assessing our planning needs for our area and how any new projects factor into those planning and community needs.

We also need comprehensive planning, which engages community members in the process before scoping, creating an ongoing planning and needs assessment for public space.

Waterfront, climate & resilience

How does climate change and resilience factor into your approach to open space? In what ways, can we make our open space more resilient to the impacts of climate change?

When Hurricane Sandy ripped through NYC, it caused significant damage in the 33rd District, including lasting harm to residents in public housing. Right now, we are unprepared to handle another hurricane of that magnitude, and our waterfront neighborhoods in Brooklyn need a plan to properly withstand the effects of another deadly storm. We can immediately invest in 'sponge city infrastructure;' permeable pavements, green roofs, and cost-effective bioswales in flood prone areas to absorb stormwater and reduce carbon emissions.

Longer-term, we need a comprehensive, citywide resiliency plan and reform of City Environment Quality Review (CEQR) procedures, exploring ways to rezone heavy flood areas as open spaces, create resiliency projects, and increase wetland restoration centers. We also need to build neighborhood energy hubs for storage, and invest in new building energy retrofits. This will create new jobs and we must prioritize communities harmed by environmental racism in hiring.

Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) is a major problem for all NYC waterways, but is acutely so for Newtown Creek and areas in the East River like Bushwick Inlet and the Wallabout Channel. Do you think that we can achieve fishable, swimmable waterways and what is your plan to reduce CSOs in order to get us there?

We can achieve fishable, swimmable waterways and it is thanks to community organizations in North Brooklyn!

I proposed in my climate platform that we eliminate combined sewer overflows (CSOs), reducing sewage overflows into the New York Bay 100%. We are in the midst of a climate crisis and need to fully address the pollution in our waterways. CSO reduction plans must take into account projected changes in sewer overflow when projects will be completed. Current plans are using rainfall totals from 2008 as projection for infrastructure that is supposed to address stormwater capture in the 2040s. We can achieve usable waterways by updating our standards and then enforcing our own data-driven policies.

To assist with sewage overflow reduction, we need to expand green and blue roof production citywide and provide greater grant incentives for green roofs. We also need to invest in permeable surfaces in areas that are flood prone, and have combined sewage overflow issues, to absorb stormwater, and create bioswales on streets along the waterfront, which are cost-effective measures to absorb runoff and mitigate flooding. We can create maintenance agreements with existing waterfront developers to ensure properly maintained green spaces.

Community-driven, climate-focused projects such as composting and food-growing are ways to make park spaces more resilient and sustainable. Would you support legislation that allows such uses? Why or why not?

Yes, I helped lead mutual aid efforts in the District during the pandemic and saw the ways that community-driven projects stepped in when government didn't, and I would support legislation to maintain new sustainability projects. When the city cut funding for organics and composting, I supported local community composting drop-off efforts and pushed for the restoration of funding for sites like Big Reuse.

At the moment, and until funding for composting is restored, mutual aid volunteers are doing the job of much of the Sanitation department. It is not enough, however, to restore sanitation funding simply to pre-pandemic levels or operations to pre-pandemic reach. We can meet NYC's goal of zero waste by 2030 if we enact a citywide mandatory organics waste program, which is more cost effective than scattered pilot programs. We can also direct city funding to the mutual aid efforts that are maintaining community composting and gardening efforts, thereby developing a local network that reduces food waste from local businesses and supporting localized food justice infrastructure.

Equity & anti-racism

How do your parks and open space policy positions/proposals address equity and anti-racism?

Discriminatory city planning initiatives have placed the health of marginalized communities in jeopardy. A lack of access to green energy planning, insufficient neighborhood green spaces, and the effects of toxic waste have led to higher instances of asthma and lead poisoning from Gowanus to Greenpoint. The scale of contamination in North Brooklyn alone is still being unearthed.

For years, local environmental advocates have been on the frontlines of neighborhood toxic clean-up and air monitoring initiatives, and have fought tirelessly to hold gas and energy companies accountable for contributing to the district's disrepair. I will work diligently with community members to hold toxic polluters accountable, divest from for-profit energy suppliers, and actively work to stop the construction of National Grid's North Brooklyn Pipeline, which is cutting through Black and Brown neighborhoods. Repeatedly, companies like National Grid show that they cannot be trusted; I will demand actionable remedies for the harm these companies have caused to our environment, and push our city and state to shift to renewable energy from reliance on fossil fuels.

I commit to fighting for a network of open green spaces that centers equity. This not only helps us meet the challenges of climate change and improve environmental health, but will also usher in a new era of safe, efficient, and sustainable transportation in New York. Campaigns like Make Meeker Move and the BQGreen acknowledge the environmental degradation done to Black and Brown communities and seek to take back public space for people.

My background is in community organizing and I will work to continually learn from directly impacted leaders and organizations while in the Council. My environmental justice and housing plans all came from neighbors and community leaders, because collaboration is critical to equity and I believe deeply in the importance of co-governance. I am not running just for myself, but to bring more of us to the table and make government more accountable to our communities. I am committed to anti-racism in open space planning and will work to bring a range of community leaders to policy planning.

How will you ensure equal access to all new, emerging, renovated and healthy open spaces, including the waterfront, irrespective of socio-economic and cultural status, and with protection from racial profiling?

Our waterfront cannot be portioned off to private development. I firmly support completing the fully connected Brooklyn Greenway to bring together the waterfront and build out fully protected bike path infrastructure. Additionally, we need to use programs like the Design for Public Space and some of the expanded city budget for parks to work with other city agencies to expand public access to open space where parks are not available. I see money coming for this connected waterfront coming from city funds divested from the NYPD. 95% of the NYPD's purview is outside of responding to violent incidents -- we rely on NYPD as the default for too many things and I support divesting from reliance on things like traffic enforcement and parks patrol for more community enforcement.

What opportunities do you see to create more open space in the district's more underserved areas?

The 33rd Council District has 7 NYCHA developments, and I would like to use money coming from the federal stimulus and infrastructure packages to prioritize open space and climate infrastructure for these communities. I am an active supporter of a Green New Deal for Public Housing and have been working with neighbors on setting up community gardens. In my housing platform, I proposed an agency that would specifically deal with developing city-owned land for supportive and deeply affordable social housing with truly comprehensive planning. It does no good to build housing with no planning for schools and open space, and by using public land for public good, we can build affordable neighborhoods for the long-term health and resiliency of underserved communities.

COVID-19

Our parks and open spaces have proven to be essential infrastructure and resources in combating the COVID-19 pandemic. How has the emphasis on the importance of open space impacted your policy positions?

The pandemic has reaffirmed my commitment to the belief that public space is a public good. It includes parks and District 33s waterfronts, but it also includes our streets and ability to move through our city. Being able to go outside was critical for my own mental health during the pandemic, and I know I'm not alone in that. Having communal spaces that are truly available and shared by everyone helps build a sense of social solidarity and collective investment in our neighborhoods. I think that is fundamental to making people feel welcome, safe, and connected to their neighbors and this city.

The critical health importance of parks and open spaces has also reinforced my commitment to holding developers and city & state agencies accountable for the park space we've long been owed. The failed promises of green space for the last 16 years are an affront to North Brooklyn and has actively compromised our communities' wellbeing. My policy positions are rooted in community care and I will bring that value to all of our public space fights.

Black and Latinx communities continue to be hardest hit by COVID-19 in NYC and a recent study shows that areas with higher levels of air pollution are more likely to suffer from deadlier impacts of the pandemic than those with cleaner air. Considering the inequitable lack of access to healthy, open spaces that can mitigate air pollution in North Brooklyn, how do you plan to locally combat this issue?

We have a responsibility to ensure our environmental policies and our climate action plan occur within the frameworks of racial and social justice. Our city's marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by the effects of climate change, and if we fail to secure a greener, more just future for all of us, then we have failed in our mission to rehabilitate our environment. The BQE has divided neighborhoods across Brooklyn, and leaves a wake of environmental racism that manifest as higher asthma and respiratory vulnerabilities in the same Black and brown communities that were disproportionately affected by COVID. The BQE is in dire need of structural repairs that meet our 21st Century and future generation environmental and transit needs - and the federal infrastructure bill presents an opportunity to reimagine this roadway with environmental justice in mind. I would like to explore options for the BQE that redirect some of its freight traffic to our waterways, and that covers the BQE with green space where possible.

We also need air monitoring and to hold developers accountable for air pollution. I will push to pass stronger legislation on fines on developers for harmful dust and air and soil pollution.

How will you support local community gardens so that they reinforce food security in parts of North Brooklyn most impacted by the economic and health impacts of COVID-19?

Community gardens are essential infrastructure, and need to be protected from harassment and land alienation. The city is sitting on empty lots and other underutilized land that we can earmark for expanded community gardens and composting sites. By funding the already existing mutual aid groups, we can sustain urban agricultural programs that can develop local systems of food security.

Street usage & parking

The pandemic has pushed the city toward greater street pedestrianization. What is your position on the current plan for permanence? How do you balance the need for increased pedestrianization with the desire for parking and prioritizing traffic flow? What is your plan to ensure public safety?

A greater emphasis on comprehensive planning can create fully connected car, bike, bus, and pedestrian networks that tame and direct traffic in responsible and intelligent ways. Piecemeal zoning and design leaves creates disjointed traffic flow. I'm in favor of designated loading zones, protected bike lanes, and finally addressing the placard abuse and illegal parking that endangers all kinds of traffic. I have also been an advocate of the Open Streets program, working with community members on programming to make our public space more accessible and inclusive. Open Streets can be made permanent with careful consideration for which streets do and don't make sense for pedestrianization. Volunteers have been maintaining these programs with little support from City Hall, and we need to commit to a program that works for a variety of accessibility, residential, and small business needs, and supports local community organizations that can take on the implementation.

What is your stance on implementing a complete street redesign on Meeker Avenue and all other streets along the BQE, including in open spaces most affected by the outcomes of vehicular pollution? How do you plan to gain support for your position?

I'm in support of the Make Meeker Move campaign, organized by a coalition of residents and neighbors in North Brooklyn who are tired of the legacy of Robert Moses' BQE dividing communities. Creating open green space that is designed to be a center of connectivity between different parts of District 33 has the potential to present a multi-pronged approach to developing more open space, addressing long-standing issues with the BQE and transit needs, and building climate resilience into designs for the space.

I would continue to work with a range of community organizations, small businesses, transit advocates and neighbors in planning redesign solutions.

Neighborhood cohesion, sustainability, anti-gentrification

North Brooklyn's open spaces feature numerous parks, but also includes our plazas, streets, sidewalks, and waterways. What's your vision for connecting these disparate spaces into a cohesive network?

I believe now is the time to redesign our streetscape and connect our public space goals with safe and creative infrastructure. We have learned a lot from the Open Streets program so far and we need to bring together public transit, design leaders and community members together to create a ground up street redesign. People are eager for more accessible public space -- and the pandemic is going to shape our outdoor experiences for years to come. The potential of walking outside without the speeding of cars, and the addition of greenery, public plazas like street seats, and safe crosswalks is a major part of why I'm running. I would like to work toward the 15-minute neighborhood model.

By overly relying on volunteers to maintain parks and open spaces, lower income communities are often marginalized and unable to benefit from many positive impacts of open space because they lack volunteers. How would you leverage local knowledge, expertise, and enthusiasm for open space without overly relying on volunteers? In what ways, would you ensure that personnel and resources are equitable?

While it has been a source of hope to see mutual aid groups step in where the city has fallen short, it has also demonstrated the gaps that have been left by an austerity mindset from our City government. It is the responsibility of the government to care for and maintain our parks -- relying on volunteers results in significant inequity across the city and uneven enforcement. Expanding our Parks budget and concentrating hiring for maintenance at the local level can broaden community investment in public spaces. The Open streets program and parks maintenance should also provide funding for community organizations and create local jobs for maintenance. Many New Yorkers are still out of work from this pandemic and job creation is an important component of economic recovery and long-term community investment.

Given the impacts of luxury development, do you envision opportunities to establish community-controlled revenue streams aimed at implementing environmental mitigation projects and healthy open spaces in lower income and racially diverse sections of the district? Please explain.

A real shortcoming of some of the development projects we have seen in the 33rd District is a failure to hold developers accountable to their promises. Our District is owed at least two parks that were promised as part of a deal with luxury developers, and there seems to be no political will to enforce these demands. The next Council Member should require impact fees on incoming waterfront development that hasn't been constructed yet as part of comprehensive planning. Other cities require it and North Brooklyn is a perfect

example of where it is needed to direct funds to environmental mitigation projects. We have zoning in our city -- not planning -- and it is time for that to change.

This administration's failure to follow through on its parks promises to the community has severely eroded public trust in government and is in conflict with the standards and agreements our government expects others to follow. We cannot continue to allow development if promises are willfully and easily broken and commitments are actually just suggestions made to developers. It is time for stronger legal action to achieve the environmental accountability communities of color deserves.