



EL PUENTE  
CULTURAL CENTER



## Sabrina Gates

### *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?

**Yes, I support this goal. There is no better time to push for equity. So many of our issues in this city are intertwined. I have often said that you cannot discuss environmental justice and health outcomes without also talking about our parks. We know they have a significant impact in each of these areas. Distribution of research must account for these factors when determining where funds need to be allocated. We have to start with the spaces that have the greatest need and stagger resources proportionate to that.**

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?

**I think that POPS are a piece of the pie that cannot replace full investment in developing real park space in our city. The advantages are that the city is not required to maintain these spaces and it places the investment in the hands of developers. That said they are underutilized and there is no real incentive for developers to promote them. While I would not discourage them, I think the city often gets the short end of the stick when these deals are made. I would rather see a more significant investment go to parks like Bushwick Inlet Park.**

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?

**I am running for City Council because I believe that people have to be at the forefront of everything we do going forward. As many have said, our budget is a moral document. We must provide capital to decrease emissions, transition to clean energy, invest in green infrastructure, and improve our communities. We must be steadfast in making sure future development includes both racial and environmental impact studies and that those conducting the studies are included throughout the entire process. Projects must build to**

**the actual need for affordable housing in this city.**

*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?

**A practical argument can be made that it makes sense to start small. You can see an immediate impact affecting more communities on a larger scale. During the pandemic people, who were not previously aware of the vast social disparities that exist in our city, became increasingly more aware. We must remain vigilant about turning that cognizance into action post pandemic. Engagement of people from all walks of life can have a significant impact on outcomes. Change however does not happen without a plan. We must start with funding and then create a strategy to fix all of our parks beginning with those with the most dire need who have been continually neglected. For those spaces who do not already have community members rallying for them I would encourage and help facilitate the creation of friends' groups. I will support these groups and connect them to the resources they need to be successful. I would also like to engage more young people as part of this process either through after school programs or other community-based organizations.**

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 love community driven ideas like these. Not only are they creative and reflect the needs of our communities, but their implementation would also improve air quality and bring much needed green space to areas that need it. Projects like Street Ends enable additional connections to water that are so vital. We live in a city of innovation. If we do not harness the power of community ideas, we can miss out on some great solutions. It is disappointing that projects like BQGreen have not been able to come to fruition after more than a decade when we see similar initiatives like The High Line thrive. We have to do a better job in this city at really listening to the priorities of the public and campaigning for these issues in a way that brings results. If elected, I would start from a place of comparative promotion. When people can visualize something beyond a model it becomes something tangible and attainable. There are opportunities to benchmark not just from places within this city but across the country and the globe. I also believe that it is imperative to build coalitions with council members in neighboring districts as well as other elected officials to build momentum.**

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?

**There are a number of issues around engagement that impact not just the development of parks but development and planning in this city overall. For me much of this has to do with communication. I believe there is a tendency to reach out to the same groups and individuals. These outlets can miss people who are not engaged not because of a lack of an interest but because of a lack of time, other commitments and the rules of engagement set forth by those organizing. When we talk about equity and access, this needs to be a consideration. That said, I believe the scope process has to go beyond one meeting. It has to seek out perspectives from a wide array of stakeholders. I also think that after there is a conceptual design, community members (not just community board members) should have an opportunity to comment on the design before it goes any further.**

*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?

**My approach is that open spaces are not just nice to have but critical infrastructure in the fight against climate change. With such reliance, it can be easy to forget that our urban backyards also need support to be resilient. Some opportunities to assist in this include an investment in planting indigenous flowers and trees to attract local insects and wildlife. Installing solar panels in additional park spaces. Expand recycling efforts. Harvest water for plant maintenance and to prevent soil erosion. When people go to parks in droves for picnics during the summer, having an additional compost receptacle seems like an easy opportunity to start educating people who don't compost at home about the value. Continued testing of soil and air quality to ensure that we can adjust behaviors where needed. Let's create a metric (not a grade) to measure areas for continued improvement.**

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?

**There is no easy answer to get us there overnight but we definitely need to be far more aggressive if we want to achieve this goal at all. I think the majority of the public does not have an adequate understanding of the situation or the part we all play in it. I am a big fan of green roofs. I support rain gardens and water harvesting. I am open to increasing capacity at water treatment facilities or creating storage units for diverted overflow. I believe that we need to use more porous materials in street construction and improve street level sanitation. There is so much we can do but above all, I believe we can start to**

**change things by giving the public at large a glimpse of what that future could look like. We are very disconnected to the water so to many the thought of fishing much less swimming in any of our waterways seems unfathomable.**

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, provided the parks are well maintained. Many community gardens have done a good job managing issues of concern including rodents and undesirable odors which might alleviate some of those concerns. Such initiatives provide greater opportunities for community engagement as well as educational opportunities for children.**

#### *Equity & anti-racism*

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

**All of my ideas look at change through the lens of equity, sustainability, and social justice. Never has there been such an opportunity to engage our communities around creating real substantive change. While the core of desired policy outcomes revolve around increasing the number of open spaces in underserved communities and improving health outcomes by virtue of some of these changes, the work must extend beyond this. What firms are we employing to design new spaces? Are we doing enough to assist DMWBE firms to scale to the level of General Contractor and not just be resigned to serving as subcontractors? What organizations are we partnering with, who is in their leadership and how do they engage in work around equity? Can we do more to build and support friends groups in low income communities in areas like fundraising and outreach? Are we diversifying outreach initiatives so those oft unheard in the process have access to not just information but also a voice?**

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?

**It is my hope that people will have access to vibrant open spaces wherever they live. As was discussed previously, there must be a commitment to prioritizing maintenance and creation in underserved communities. A place to rest, exercise, socialize, or play should not be more than a short walk away for all New Yorkers. Nevertheless, we know different spaces can accommodate different resources. I believe that programming in open spaces is a great avenue to promote these spaces, introduce people to the facilities, and connect people to one another.**

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

**While we wait for more permanent solutions, there are needs that exist right now. Where it is safe and possible can we go beyond basic green roofs and help create mini parks and/or gardens for residents? I want to do a block-by-block needs assessment where we can also capture opportunities to temporarily employ vacant lots. We can also use this to harvest community led ideas not just about space opportunities but also about programming desires.**

*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?

**It has not significantly affected my policy position. I have always valued parks and the parks department. I understand the critical role parks play in city life and have always known them to be significantly underfunded. I will say the pandemic did move me to explore additional parks all over the city. The increased volume at many parks did not allow for the type of social distancing many would have liked reaffirming the need for more open spaces.**

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 to continue to monitor the situation and systematically work on improvements. From requiring electric buses on routes in these areas to planting more trees to incentivizing both business and homeowners to make improvements, there has to be a concerted effort that also engages communities in the process.**

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?

**I would provide funding for gardens that include educational opportunities, food swaps, and giving rows as part of their community.**

### *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?

**Open streets were very popular however I don't think they were well executed initially. Some areas in our district had significant problems with people adhering to street closures and shared roads. This was not safe. I support the idea but prefer to look at roadways that can be fully converted to pedestrian plazas. These would have to not cause congestion and would also have to factor in access to public transportation. In areas where it was successful, it should remain. I do think that community sponsorship did make a world of difference in maintaining the program.**

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 would need to do significantly more research regarding this issue before committing any plan. I generally agree that a redesign is necessary and that it does provide an opportunity to connect communities, provide foot traffic for businesses and expand open spaces in a blighted area. I would work with the next council member in the neighboring district to see how we can collaborate.**

### *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?

**This is actually an area where we need to bolster city planning so we have a long-term vision of how we want to transform the city to benefit all New Yorkers. The Brooklyn Greenway Initiative provides some insight on how we can start to find ways to connect communities.**

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?

**This question harkens back to the need for additional funds for Parks. There needs to be an increase in staffing and those roles also need to be distributed to communities that need it the most. While building capacity, staff members can assist with recruiting volunteers and planning programming that spurs additional involvement.**

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.

**Yes. I think there are some solid opportunities in this area. I would however want to see us start to address much of the impact prior to development. The onus should not be put on impacted communities to remedy already troubling disparities exacerbated by such development.**