



EL PUENTE
BRIDGE AND PUBLIC CENTER



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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 have been an active supporter and promoter of “Play Fair” since it began. It is one of the reasons I decided to run for the City Council. As founder of the Cadman Park Conservancy, I know first-hand the challenges that NYC Parks faces operating at a below reasonable budget. I was a part of the “Brooklyn Strand” project that looked at improving parks in communities of color. It is vital that we expand open spaces in these areas.

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?

So, I am a supporter of Public/Private Partnerships, but we need to be very careful when creating these relationships to ensure there is a balanced benefit for both parties involved. Proceed with caution, is what I think.

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?

We need to get the community more involved. This may simply mean the creation of identifying and implementing “green wall” projects in areas where there is a lack of green spaces and build out from there. We can investigate park potential on city-owned land in areas around communities of color. We may consider eminent domain (when appropriate) in creating a blueprint to address the inequities of the past.

At the same time, reducing the number of cars, helicopters, and other non-essential polluters. This can be achieved by increased investment in our public transportation system.

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?

I am the best advocate for parks running for city council in district 33. The Cadman Park Conservancy works with NYC Parks on the care and maintenance of Cadman Plaza Park, Walt Whitman Park, and the Korean War Veterans Plaza. In our 10-years, we've successfully advocated for over \$12 million in necessary park capital repairs, but because the system is so broken, the timeline for these projects to begin is estimated to be 5-years or "unknown." Based on my real-life experiences I would strongly advocate for a borough-wide investment to lower our 30-year backlog of repair work.

I would also work with Parks on streamlining the process. It should not cost \$1.5 million to renovate an already existing bathroom. It should not cost \$6.2 million to replace three water fountains. It should not cost \$1.4 million to install a pneumatic one-story elevator. By reviewing our processes, we can do more with what we have.

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?

BQGreen is an unfulfilled promise, yet it holds the key to many possibilities all over Brooklyn. I am hoping that funds for the BQGreen will be included in the Federal \$2.2 trillion Infrastructure bill being considered by Congress and the President. As an active member of the BQET who fought the city successfully and prevented the removal of the Promenade and three other active NYC parks, I believe that the BQGreen could be applied to the "trench" in Cobble Hill, another green project I support. As for smaller green spaces, I will foster, inspire and support our community park organizations so that smaller parks can thrive through public and private funds. I am the only candidate in this race with 10-years of experience in this area. (We must also support design/build wherever and whenever we can.)

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?

This is my area of expertise. I have a knack for bringing people together on important projects that affect the community: including the redesign of Tillary Street and other public projects. I was involved with seeking community input for the BQX light rail. I am known for getting people to public hearings in large numbers when the issue affects the community.

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?

Our mission is to reduce carbon emissions while investing in cleaner, greener energy sources. We will look to all forms of renewable energy including kinetic underwater turbines and hydrogen fuel cells, these new/old technologies can be used with solar and wind to reduce our carbon footprint. We can be the leader in cleaner, greener, and more efficient energy sources. We need to commit to the 2030/2050 plan.

District 33 suffered greatly from Superstorm Sandy. We need a sea wall from Greenpoint to Red Hook and we need it now.

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?

This is caused by our aging infrastructure and growing population. "We have met the problem and it is us." Water-World, a wastewater trade website recommends the following: Four main methods can be used, either separately or combined, to eliminate or reduce CSO problems: in-line retention storage, off-line retention storage, high-rate clarification treatment and sewer separation. I've read how all of these systems work and they can also be applied to the Gowanus as well. We need to invest in our infrastructure. If there is money for this in the infrastructure bill, I will fight for it.

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?

I support compost stations in all NYC Parks. I have not seen a model for city sponsored food-growing parks. I have visited one in Red Hook and I am intrigued. I support community food-growing. I would have to see all the details of the model in order to protect all involved, including the city.

Equity & anti-racism

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

Parks are the great equalizer. It doesn't matter your faith, ethnicity, country of origin, or financial status, everyone is welcome in New York City Parks. But like much of the city, bureaucracy and red tape cause project overruns and wasteful spending of our tax dollars. We need to increase funding to our parks not only for maintenance purposes but to ensure a safe environment for all that want to enjoy our open spaces.

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?

I think Brooklyn Bridge Park, Prospect Park and Central Park is a great example of inclusion, as is Cadman Plaza Park and Walt Whitman. The park is open to all.

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

By creating more outdoor markets, smaller parks, and pop-up playgrounds on city-owned land. We can also build "green walls" wherever appropriate as a community-based project.

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?

As a result of COVID-19 I will fight to restore the annual budget to 1% of the city budget. I will also support a one-time \$500 million cash infusion over 10 years, to address the backlog of capital repair work.

However, it's time for NYC Parks to modernize its own self. Rules, procedures, and procurement need to be brought into the 21st century. This also includes lowering the cost of capital repair projects and building new structures like bathrooms and public pools.

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?

This is where my experience as a neighborhood advocate comes into play. We need to go into communities of color and engage all stakeholders. We need to listen and to act, quickly. There are trust issues that need to be repaired. Then and only then working with the community can we begin to mitigate air and noise pollution. I would also look at advocating for "green walls." They are a great way to begin to show the benefits of greener spaces as well as teaching community involvement. We can move forward from there.

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?

We need to provide funds to support community gardens, provide non-profits with support to help the community. And further invest in underserved communities that have limited access to quality, healthy food options.

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?

There are three guaranteed ways of making our streets and sidewalks safer: 1. invest in mass transit, 2. invest in mass transit, and 3. invest in mass transit. As an avid cyclist myself I don't mind saying that we need to start ticketing cyclists (including electric bikes) who ride on sidewalks. We also need to increase protected bike paths and provide public parking for cyclists. I am an advocate for people with disabilities and curbside and street restaurants present another new challenge. We need to better define the regulations that establish what is allowable and what is not and then enforce these rules.

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 like to see the BQE rebuilt underground as the BQE Tunnel. I have seen successful busy streets turned into public plaza's (ala Times Square). I am always in favor of a redesign that will make our streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

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?

As an active participant in the "Brooklyn Strand" we looked at this very subject. It's not easy but not impossible. It all involved increases in mass transit to reduce traffic in order to unite these areas into one cohesive network. I have a plan to do this from Borough Hall to Dumbo and back around via Atlantic Avenue.

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?

Once people volunteer to help parks, they learn to love the work. I have hosted and organized events that have brought over 100 volunteers together to help NYC Parks. However, to entice people who have been on the outside of volunteerism we need to create an incentive program that includes scholarships and job training. There is plenty of room for this with NYC Parks.

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.

The city relies too much on developers to do the things that the city is responsible for. I am not against as previously mentioned public/private partnerships. That is fine, but we need to draw the line at some point, because all too often we give away too much which ultimately hurts communities of color. I am a supporter of reparative justice for the BIPOC community and within those goals I outline funding for more parks and green spaces. Let's not as a city forget the debt that is owed to those who have suffered from more than a century of institutionalized racism. Let this upcoming City Council pave a path of healing. That would be some legacy to be a part of.