



EL PUENTE
COMMUNITY 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?

We have to commit to a realistic funding goal that will sustain our parks, and I'm supportive of the 1% maintenance and operations budget. We need to dedicate City resources to ensure that parks receive equitable attention - this means prioritizing the parks in communities of color, low-income areas, and industrial neighborhoods that don't have active and well-funded conservancies. Access to green space is a critical component of physical and mental health, and thus it must be a priority to ensure each neighborhood has adequate access. As a Council Member, I will use discretionary funds to fill gaps in communities that need it most - to ensure all residents of the 33rd District have high quality parks, schools, and other infrastructure.

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?

Our Parks Department should be sufficiently funded to maintain and construct our parks. Not only will I advocate for additional Parks funding, but in land use negotiations, I will use every opportunity to push for amenities, including open space.

That being said, POPS have the potential to open up much-needed additional green space and take maintenance burdens away from the strained Parks Department. A successful example of a POPS site is Domino Park. However, in these instances, we need to ensure that the spaces are truly public spaces that welcome all of our neighbors. For example, I was disturbed by the Domino security policies earlier this year. We also need to have strong partnerships with the property owner to ensure proper maintenance and commitment to consistent community engagement.

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?

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the health inequities in our city. Health outcomes are determined by a web of factors including historical inequities, living conditions (i.e. overcrowded housing), employment in service occupations, concentrations of people experiencing poverty, and of course access to green space.

As a Council Member, I will reverse course on the giveaways to the real estate industry that we've grown accustomed to in the 33rd, and make sure that new development is working for our community. We need housing, yes, but we need it to be affordable, and we also need infrastructure like schools, parks, quality jobs, and transportation access. These priorities will be essential in any conversation I have about development in the 33rd. I will use my influence in land use decisions, my discretionary funding, my bully pulpit, to effectively partner with local advocates in order to fight tooth and nail for healthy, livable neighborhoods across the 33rd District.

I am a strong supporter of the BQGreen project and believe it can transform a 20th century relic that has undermined the public health of the Southside community and turn it into infrastructure we believe in with a significant new park for the green space starved Southside community.

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?

Our Parks Department needs to prioritize repairs and maintenance in the neighborhoods that need it most. I will work with colleagues in the Council to advocate for the necessary funding, and I will work with the Parks Department to ensure we get to these neighborhoods first. Community groups should be at the table from the beginning, so that we can use the dense brain trust in North Brooklyn to leverage and equitably distribute all of the resources at our disposal.

Alongside North Brooklyn Parks Alliance, I will do my best to galvanize new Friends groups for every green space, so we can take more initiative in maintaining and improving our green spaces. If we can raise more funds for NBPA, they can help dedicate supplemental funding for our parks that need it most.

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?

One of my favorite things about North Brooklyn is its do-it-yourself culture. The passionate, creative, visionary residents of North Brooklyn are truly what make our neighborhood so great. I would work with coalitions across North Brooklyn to develop and advocate for initiatives we want to see. Beyond influence over the Parks Department's budget and my own discretionary funding, I'd be interested in exploring additional creative ways to bring our ideas into fruition. As I mentioned, I will be using land use negotiations as a mechanism for bringing investments and amenities to the district. Finally, I think we need to look beyond the Parks Department and identify ways to build open space and enhance connectivity into other capital investment happening in our neighborhood. With any City project, we should be looking for ways to serve multiple purposes - potentially creating new plazas, gardens, or bike lanes.

I will always be a proponent for more open space. I believe in the big, bold, visionary BQGreen project and I think the Manhattan Avenue Street end park is a good example of how we can and should pedestrianize and green more open spaces.

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?

As we saw recently with the State's Marsha P. Johnson Park, it is imperative that we implement a rigorous engagement process for any local park project. North Brooklyn has a wealth of history and character that should be accounted for in any park design. As a Council Member, I would work regularly and closely with the Parks Department to ensure that we are in the loop about all projects at their inception, and that each of them receive the necessary public input to move forward. I want to make it as easy as possible for us to solicit community input - from in person planning sessions and Zoom get-togethers to meetings with students and surveys at dog runs and recreational events to creating an email account for collecting suggestions - we can get far more people involved in imagining the future of our parks.

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?

The waterfront defines the 33rd District, and the climate crisis is the existential crisis of our time. There is no greater or more urgent issue facing us and future generations, but big changes are often born of small beginnings. We don't have to wait for someone else to act - we can make a difference on the ground in our neighborhoods in the 33rd. Climate change is my top priority - and will be factored into all of my decision-making. Making our

open spaces, particularly waterfront ones, more resilient, is critical. Using green energy sources, native flora and fauna, and other sustainable materials, our parks should be built to withstand the next big storm and rising sea levels.

The rezoning of our waterfront included the promise of multiple new parks. While the towers have been built or are in the process of going up, much of our promised park space has been hopelessly delayed. We need a Council Member who will ensure the City fulfills the promises made to our community. Smartly designed parks at Box Street and Bushwick Inlet can meaningfully enhance the health and wellbeing and resilience of our community.

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?

The City's plan to reduce CSOs is wildly inadequate and far too slow. Decades from now, we will still have sewage pouring into our waterways when it rains. We can and must deepen our investments in green infrastructure and impose much steeper reductions in the CSO volume with much faster implementation timetables. This is simply a question of political will and resources. DEP can and must get it done.

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?

Absolutely - we need to prioritize carbon free, zero waste initiatives in order to make our city sustainable. Fighting climate change is my top priority, and I would happily support and advocate for multifaceted programming to help make the 33rd District more sustainable. We must mandate curbside composting pick up.

Equity & anti-racism

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

All of the City's recovery efforts need to be centered in equity and anti-racism. The disparities that exist in our city, exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, are unacceptable and need to be proactively destroyed. In North Brooklyn, we have seen too much uneven investment over the years, and we need to fix that now.

An equity-focused parks and open space platform is one that prioritizes improvements and resources in communities of color that need it most and ensures that these communities are at the forefront of all planning and design of new spaces.

We must also emphasize street safety improvements to complement parks and open space improvements -- particularly in areas of North Brooklyn that are still quite industrial. Overall traffic mitigation, particularly of trucks, is critical for making our air cleaner and our streets safer. The industrial heritage in North Brooklyn and the ever-growing e-commerce market, along with increased residential development in the area, makes revising the city's truck routes more important than ever.

Finally, Greenpoint has been an epicenter of environmental injustice. We have to expedite necessary environmental remediation in the area so our children aren't breathing in century-old toxins. We need the City, the State, and any private interests to invest together in comprehensive cleanups and remediation.

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 public spaces always need to be truly public. Every New Yorker needs to feel safe and welcome in our parks. First of all, we should not have police in our parks. Any profiling, whether it comes from cops or from local residents, will not be tolerated. I will not be afraid to call out any unfair treatment in our parks. I spend a lot of time in our parks and open spaces, and as a Council Member I would use them as spaces for community organizing and constituent services, working to ensure that all residents of the 33rd know they belong.

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

We need a long-term plan to add open space to underserved communities. Open space is a critical component of mental and physical health. With a combination of funding and creativity, I would want to develop a plan in tandem with the community to make these spaces a reality. As we work toward this end, we should take advantage of the City's Open Streets/Restaurants/Culture programs to bring life to our streets and create ad hoc open spaces. Similarly, we should be finding ways to integrate open space into existing infrastructure projects.

Box Street Park in northern Greenpoint and BQGreen are two existing proposals that would go a long way toward addressing lack of green space in our most underserved areas in North Brooklyn.

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 City's open streets initiatives have been a silver lining during this pandemic and have changed the status quo for how we use our roadways. While I think more deliberation, analysis, and community engagement is needed for determining which Open Streets should be made permanent, I think the initiative has been a positive for our neighborhood. Parks have also been more important than ever. I think the emphasis on open space during the pandemic has highlighted both the desperate need for more parks and open spaces, as well as the possibilities available to us when we are creative. If anything, these initiatives have solidified the fact that we can and must be more ambitious if we are going to unlock the potential within our communities.

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?

Creating more open spaces will be an important facet of mitigating air pollution in our community. Improving air quality is critical for our health and safety, and requires a more comprehensive approach. Climate change is my top priority, and I have a plan with 53 concrete proposals to make the 33rd District the first carbon neutral one. My plan includes electrifying and retrofitting buildings, prioritizing efficiency upgrades for NYCHA buildings, encouraging solar power, renewables, and composting, creating green jobs, and reimagining our transportation systems. Implementing these initiatives in the neighborhoods that are most vulnerable to the effect of climate change, including air pollution, will be critical.

Full plan: <https://lincolnrestler.medium.com/roadmap-to-carbon-neutrality-in-the-33rd-district-white-paper-57fe255430d6>

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 have a wealth of benefits -- social cohesion, education, health, and more -- and we need to encourage these spaces in our neighborhoods by finding ways for the City to formally support them, and to integrate them into the local nutritional infrastructure (pantries, supermarkets, greenmarkets). I am proud to have helped secure the space for two wonderful community gardens in our community on Java Street and Myrtle Avenue and, if elected, hope to help create many more.

Food insecurity is a systemic issue that has been exacerbated by COVID-19, and if we are going to truly tackle it, we also need to make sure we address the underlying causes of food insecurity in our city, largely tied to structural racism and poverty. I have partnered with local emergency food provider Los Sures to bring fresh food to NYCHA developments in North Brooklyn each week and would expand similar efforts of linking fresh, affordable, high quality food from local community gardens, CSAs, and other initiatives to low-income communities.

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?

The added pedestrian space throughout the city has been great! As we move to permanent versions of these programs, we need to center equity and make sure all New Yorkers have access to these amenities. Communities that need these spaces most are often less equipped with strong volunteer networks. The City needs to fill this gap -- and not with police officers. Resources to create and maintain open spaces, particularly in communities of color, must be made available. The City must lead extensive community engagement processes and conduct thorough analyses to determine which Open Streets should be made permanent and which new streets should be piloted. To ensure safety, all road users - bus operators, pedestrians, and cyclists - should have their own right of way. We need to have complete streets with designated pedestrian space: sidewalks, open streets, plazas, etc., designated cyclist space: protected, continuous bike lanes, dedicated bus lanes that are camera enforced, spaces for deliveries and drop-offs, and finally a traffic lane for drivers. Road users tend to veer into dangerous territory when they don't have space, so the best way to minimize conflict is to maximize the ability to stay in each mode's respective lane.

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 support creating a safer design on Meeker Avenue and would leverage the strong local coalition to work with DOT and Parks to develop a bold, feasible, long term plan that serves all street users, including protected two-way bike lanes, more pedestrian space, better lighting, greening of the space and more.

We need to provide real housing solutions and direct services to the unhoused individuals who have been residing under the BQE.

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?

Creating continuity of our open spaces requires looking holistically at the neighborhood and identifying where connections can be fortified, and where new spaces can be unlocked. We should leverage our Open Streets/Open Restaurants/Open Culture programs to create pathways between our open spaces, strengthen our protected bike lane network, and enhance pedestrian space at some of our triangles, like at Bedford-Nassau-Lorimer and Calyer and Franklin Streets.

We also need to minimize the bifurcation created by the BQE and McGuinness Boulevard by making each of these areas more pedestrian-friendly with better pedestrian markings, green spaces, bike lanes, and lower speed limits.

The realization of the long-promised esplanade connecting waterfront greenspaces will also help connect our future waterfront park spaces.

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?

Selfless volunteers in parts of North Brooklyn have single-handedly made our Open Streets some of the most successful in the city. Local expertise needs to be integrated in all of our projects and programming, but we need a balance between volunteers and public resources. The City should support staffing, outreach, supplies for Open Streets and Parks maintenance, particularly in neighborhoods that need them most. Local experts and volunteers should work in tandem with the city to tailor open spaces to the needs of each community. I will be fighting for a budget that has these resources, and a process that lends itself to a productive synergy between local knowledge and government operations.

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.

My approach to new development will be ensuring that it actually serves the 33rd District - through jobs, open space, affordability, and other much-needed infrastructure. I would certainly be open to exploring potential commitments for environmental mitigation projects. Aside from negotiating new development, I would be happy to work with the community to develop priority projects and identify funding streams to support them.