



EL PUENTE
CULTURAL 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 do. I will only vote for a budget that supports the goal of 1% budget allocation to maintenance and operation of our city's parks. Too often communities that are lower income and communities of color are not given access to parks and green space. Any affirmative budget vote would need to have money specifically earmarked to be directed towards these communities.

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?

My preference is for public spaces to be run for and by the city. However, green space is so important that if the only option is to work with folks on POPS, I'm not against them and would be supportive. I will not, however, allow developers to use the enticement of POPS in order to get construction projects approved that I don't believe serve the best interest of the community. I would like any developments to include public spaces, and for the city to create as much publicly owned green space as possible.

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?

Parks are Public Health. Communities with greater access to green space have lower rates of chronic illness. As I've seen during the pandemic by working with our public hospitals, if we don't address these conditions, they lead to higher levels of complication and deaths in communities without open space access. It is a priority to me that there is equitable access to open space. I will support the establishment of a citywide open space equity study and commensurate investment to ameliorate environmental racism where it is found, including in our own 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?

I signed on to the Save Our Parks petition by New Yorkers for Parks, which is supported by most parks Friends of groups. The petition demanded restoration of funding for the parks department. I am also supportive of the New Yorkers for Parks 5-point plan for Park Equity.

I will make sure that my office always works with community groups and residents on ensuring under resourced spaces get the resources they need for open spaces, no matter the size of the space.

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 am very supportive of these efforts and want to make sure that they have the support they need to thrive, without getting caught up in government bureaucracy that can slow down their work. The flexibility of community-driven efforts is their greatest strength.

I believe that community driven efforts should be supported by the council. I will appoint folks to the community boards in District 33 who share that vision.

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?

We should establish standing advisory boards of leaders drawn from already existing communities (religious spaces, community centers, neighborhood associations, etc.). And we should hold as many public forums as possible and advertise these ACROSS the digital divide, so folks that are not computer savvy can participate. I think the awful plastic mural that was almost constructed at Marsha P Johnson Park is a case study in what we should be avoiding.

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?

Climate change and resilience is a primary factor in my approach to open space and i believe that all open space. In order to address CSO we need to be creating more green infrastructure which absorbs rainwater and prevents it from entering the sewage

overflow system. In addition, we need to build coastlines on waterfront parks capable of alleviating storm surge as well as higher tides impact on ebb and flow.

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?

I want to see swimmable and fishable east river in the next ten years. In fact, it is currently swimmable outside of CSO events. However, by dumping sewage into the creeks and rivers every time it rains, we are reversing the major environmental progress it made and increasing enterococci levels to dangerous quantities. We need to modernize our sewage system so we no longer use an antiquated CSO system. We also need more green infrastructure to absorb rainwater overflow prior to modernizing the system and Grey infrastructure where it is necessary.

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. Because they are necessary for us to make our spaces more resilient and sustainable.

Equity & anti-racism

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

Ensuring equitable access to open spaces, and equitable funding for spaces across the city, are the core of my open space policy. This does not just mean equal funding, but also, increased funding in areas traditionally underfunded.

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?

We need to make sure that everyone has access to spaces and they are built in all communities, not just communities that are seeing booms in high-rise development. In addition, I do not believe private security forces should be patrolling our parks, even if they are POPS, because they are not accountable to the city. We need to work to make sure everyone feels safe and comfortable in every park in the city.

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

I think we can take advantage of unused and abandoned spaces to build more parks and community gardens. I also believe we can be supporting the creation of rooftop farms and

gardens and providing access to them to communities when possible. In addition, we need to take spaces, like the roadway under BQE, which are now used for parking, and convert them into park space (shout out to Make Meeker Move!).

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?

Parks are public health. More access to open space improves community health.

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?

By supporting equitable access to open space and funding open space in all communities.

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?

By giving them the resources, they need to continue operations and by using pooled resources and access to essential resources like compost. In addition, we can use these community gardens to provide locally grown food and develop system to provide community access to the food through free markets and to local schools.

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 Open Streets program was a great stop-gap program during the pandemic to address the need for public space. However, the mayor's office gave up on planning and left it up to communities to fend for themselves. While this creates a fast and flexible program, it did not create a sustainable or safe program. We need a citywide open streets program that listens to community concerns and develops real barricade infrastructure and integrates emergency services into its planning. I believe the city should invest in retractable bollards which can be used to transform streets into open spaces but be removed for emergencies. In addition, while I want there to be less car usage in general from greater public transportation and transportation alternatives (bikes and feet) the city needs to create more underground parking to free up space on roadways.

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 believe it can provide much needed park space and should not be used for parking. I think we need to get city agency buy in into the plan and allocate adequate funding for a full redesign.

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?

By working with communities in which these spaces exist to learn about gaps in existing networks and find where there is spaces to improve connectivity.

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?

We need to fully fund our parks and park maintenance, and we need a parks department that is responsive to the needs of a community. I want my office to be a liaison between citizens and city government that for too long has ignored their demands. We will hound these agencies until they listen to the needs of the people.

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. We need to increase revenue to provide funding for parks. I do not believe the government should be relying on a donation based economy to maintain and build public infrastructure.