



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?

Yes, I am in support of increasing the Park Budget to at least \$900 million. Budgets reflect our priorities and open space and parks need to be a priority. As for distributing it equitably, the first step is to have all the basic needs of the existing parks met. You can't create new spaces until the ones you have are taken care of. Then you have to look at open space compared to per capita and start creating open spaces in areas that are underserved. And as we create the space make sure services are provided that provide what the community wants and needs. Not all neighborhoods need the same things. Real community input should be obtained as spaces are designed.

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?

This is a slippery slope. It is for sure that private developers need to give back to our communities. But rich people move to rich neighborhoods and create great open spaces. Two Trees didn't fund a park in Brownsville since it gave them no return on their investment. Domino Park provides great amenities to millions of people but mostly to their development, exactly as River Ring will do. We want parks like Domino to be built and more importantly maintained but we want parks all over the city as nice as Domino. Private money needs to make its way to other areas less well served; I would recommend into a general fund in the Parks Department for improvement of all parks where the protocols I described above could be followed.

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 make decisions through a public health lens. Not just asthma and cancer, but mental health, wellness, life expectancy, and community health. Open spaces promote public health, reduced noise levels promote public health, well-paying jobs with benefits promote public health. We need better affordable housing but not units made of toxic materials and shoddy construction. We need better jobs that protect our health and provide stability and a work-life balance.

Economic growth does not guarantee healthy growth. I would ask any developer or new business how they are going to promote a healthy community. Will they use sustainable materials, will they use electric vehicles, will they pay fair wages?

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?

You ask the questions in the wrong order. How do engage the community in developing a plan to prioritize long overlooked and under resourced spaces? Parks are mostly utilized by people who live near them, so you need to go to them and hear their input, in the appropriate languages and at the appropriate times. And you also need to travel the neighborhoods and see spaces yourself. I am sure that most spaces have someone (or ones) who clean up the local open space, get to know them and hear them. If a park has a conservancy, put it lower on your list. From that input and observation you then develop a plan to bring the park what it needs.

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?

In an urban area like NYC there is no such thing as a small open space. The most important thing we can have here is a connection to open air and green spaces and if it is Manhattan Street End or Flushing Meadows, we need to recognize it for the part it plays. In District 33 we could have a park-a-month event or adopt-a-park for schools. Supporting arts and culture in parks as well as sports and recreation is also crucial to people connecting to their open spaces. We could match an artist to a site and let them have events or exhibitions.

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?

Outreach is very hard, I have been to several parks scoping sessions and they tend to go fairly well, though of course they get the same folks at them. You need to go where people are already in their schools and their churches. Determine the probable use area and make sure you get to them, more language outreach, different times of the day. One session is never enough.

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?

We know that a resilient waterfront is necessary to completely protect our city from rising sea levels and worsening storms. No wall will keep us safe. We need plantings that can survive salt water and times of getting inundated, soft edges and we need to make the waterfront accessible to everyone, then we understand what it is and how we protect it. I grew up on the ocean and we knew that it guided our lives not the other way around. I am not a coastal designer but there are groups like Waterfront Alliance and Billion Oyster Project that know a lot about the subject and like with other subjects I don't know a lot of details about, I turn to people that do.

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?

As someone who wants to represent D33 I have to include the Gowanus Canal in that list. Yes, we can achieve fishable swimmable waterways, but it will take decades. Thankfully we don't consider it such a good idea anymore to dump raw sewage into our waterways but we have to fight a century of doing just that. We need to redesign our sewage system to direct all waste to treatment plants, we need to seriously invest in green infrastructure, we need buildings of all sizes to be responsible for their water run off and sewage storage or even treatment. And like with coastal resiliency I would work closely with groups like NCA and GCC and SWIM to force the city to find truly workable methods as quickly as possible, and obviously continue to work with the EPA on our superfund sites.

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?

Of course! It drives me crazy that those uses are considered not acceptable for parks. I have one mantra when it comes to parks, there are many different types and uses. Many people like to go to parks to exercise or just relax but some want to paint or write, some want to grow things, playgrounds need to be designed for neuro-atypical kids along with all the others. But yes, growing food and composting should be part of what some parks are used for.

Equity & anti-racism

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

As I just said parks should be multi-use spaces, they are the great equalizer, people can come and enjoy themselves, sports can be played by all, protestors and demonstrators can use them, people can hold birthday parties and weddings and walk their dogs even off leash at certain times. Parks should certainly not be gated and should have no fences around them. We need to promote diversity in their uses by allowing multiple types of activities,

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 this question is referring to the partying that happens in the parks and open spaces throughout the city. Rich people have private places to go and party but most of us need to use the public open spaces and that often infringes on people who live near them. If the only open space provided is the front yard to a market-rate luxury building then those folks are going to have to put up with some disturbances.

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

As I just said there is no such thing as a small open space. Let's take every piece of unused city land and turn it into a garden or dog run. Work with the community and find the resources and the need and make each lot a permanent open space. On top of that we have to finish Bushwick Inlet Park. that alone will serve tens of thousands of people throughout 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?

I have never not considered open spaces essential infrastructure.

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?

Other than what I said before about locating parks in underserved areas, we need to reduce traffic and car usage throughout the city. Open streets, as controversial as they are in North Brooklyn, are crucial to having cleaner air and healthier neighborhoods. More public plazas and finishing greenways creating more bicycle paths and we need to take as much freight off the roads as possible so it can travel by cleaner methods like rail, barges and cargo bikes.

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 will fund them as much as I can. I will connect them to resources locally and citywide. I will fight for any of them on public land to be able to stay there in perpetuity.

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?

Right now, the DOT is just making a mess of it. It is under-resourced and has unclear rules and guidelines. But we need to make the program permanent. As I told another group, streets are public spaces, not just for cars. Cars cause air pollution and kill people, and every mode of transportation has equal right to be a safe and effective way for people to get around. A bike or a Revel take up less space than a car and certainly hurt many fewer people. But we need to transition more slowly. Phase things in, really work on public education and make sure the infrastructure is in place. It takes time to bring people around.

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?

Meeker Avenue is a horrible street. It is not safe for anyone. Yes, we need to redesign it.

I want to work with all members of the community as to what that should be. I would like it to have much less parking, much more public space such as skateparks and basketball courts, and of course protected bike and pedestrian lanes. I would gain support by talking to people, not everyone wants the same thing, so you start with a common denominator and build out from there.

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?

We need safe streets and street crossings, along with fewer cars, so that people can get from one place to another on foot. We need bike paths and bike parking to get around and in-between neighborhoods. We need safe and easy access to the water, both for boating and just to experience it. Put all these elements in place and you will have a cohesive network.

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?

No response from the candidate.

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.

I believe you are asking if rich developers should give low-income areas money to make their communities healthier. No, I think the rich should be taxed more and the government should give low-income communities money to be spent in ways to make their neighborhoods healthier.