



EL PUENTE  
BRIDGE AND PARKS CENTER



## April Somboun

### *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?

**I do support this goal. As your council member, I will serve on the Parks and Recreation committee and fight to restore the parks budget, and advocate for ensuring the budget is equitably distributed to the lower-income neighborhoods.**

**In my *Contract with District 33*, I commit to fighting to restore the parks budget. When I'm the next city council person, I will do a complete audit of the parks in our district, meet with local residents and park organizations to better learn the needs of each park. This will help me ascertain how I will ensure the funds are used properly and equitably distributed in lower income neighborhoods.**

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?

**With my background in creating multi-million dollar partnerships with corporations and nonprofits, I can bring my expertise to the role and help secure funding to parks due to the economic setbacks that we have faced this past year. It's imperative that we leverage philanthropic, nonprofit, and private resources to help us fund the parks department. Each park would be evaluated case-by-case because not every park will fit into a public-private partnership model and it would be dependent on the needs of the park. If one park needs comfort facilities, that is something that the city should provide. Now, if the park needs a substantial amount of capital investment, then this scenario requires a different plan where the community can actually see the realized potential of the 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?

**The environment is a top priority of mine, and I fully support the protection of our green spaces - and the creation of new ones. We have to strike a better balance between development and preservation. We must also make changes that reduce carbon emissions, especially in our underserved neighborhoods. My plan is to make sure that community members have a seat at the land use table. Development decisions have to be made with complete transparency, and community involvement.**

*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?

**First and foremost, I will always include the community and create a Park's Community Committee to ensure your voice, your vision and community needs are heard and delivered. I believe in 100% transparency and I will do this by talking to community members, creating a full audit of the parks in District 33 and have a system in place that provides us the intel needed to make decisions that are smart and puts the community first.**

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 live next to the BQE and it's an artery that needs to be reimagined, redesigned and rebuilt to get rid of the Robert Moses-era design that has divided communities and has caused a lot of inequities. We can build an equitable BQE that benefits all neighborhoods from Brooklyn to Queens by creating a greenway belt that will help mitigate the climate crises, create economic growth and improve the health of residents and their homes.**

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?

**Transparency and communication are key. I will hold monthly town halls that are specific to different topics and I will ensure my website is up to date with all the information you need. It will be a one-stop destination for all things related to District 33 and will be organized in a way that is easy to navigate. For those that don't have access to a computer and/or Internet, they can call my office, and I will ensure information is sent to their home. I will also ensure distribution of regular bi-weekly emails and that our website is up to date with all the essential news, information, resources and the latest happenings in District 33**

**and throughout NYC so everyone is informed. Along with print mailers that provide residents with useful information.**

*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?

**Parks are essential to our quality of life and our health plus, it will help make our city more resilient to climate change. When creating new or expanding on existing open space, we must always take into consideration climate change and how we can protect our neighborhoods and residents.**

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?

**Yes, we can achieve fishable, swimmable waterways. There are multiple options but, we must do a thorough assessment of each area. Some of the ways we can reduce CSOs are to create retention basins to help hold the overflow during storm events, expand wastewater treatment capacity or build new sustainable infrastructure to reduce stormwater flows.**

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 this one hundred percent. I have been composting since I was a kid. I grew up poor and one way to save money and ensure we had nutritious and good food on the table was to use our backyard and sometimes we'd rent a plot, if it was available and within our budget. I am the Chief Compost Officer for our community garden and we understand the need for composting and its benefits to our environment. This is a win-win for all. We're growing food to help with food insecurity and helping reduce our carbon footprint. This is one way to achieve our climate goals as a city and state.**

*Equity & anti-racism*

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

**First of all, by creating more transparency within the decision-making process, and by giving the community a seat at the table, more voices will be heard when important decisions are being made. I will also call upon enforcement agencies and departments to be more culturally aware. Diversity is what makes Brooklyn so great, and we must do more to embrace our diverse cultures within our policies.**

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 will work to push for policies and ordinances that are not discriminatory, and work to remove those that are. I will also push to create a culture of understanding, empathy and diversity within our city leadership.**

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

**There is an abundance of opportunities to create more open space - we need to have a full audit of the district's unused spaces and its capacity is one way to expand open spaces in underserved areas. I will work with city planners, landscape architects and the community to make this happen. Everyone deserves open spaces for their quality of life and mental health.**

#### *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?

**During this pandemic, I grew to love parks even more. Parks are essential to our quality of life and our health. Plus, they help make our city more resilient to climate change. Without parks, I don't know what I would have done during the peak of the pandemic and today with my children. It is our sanctuary and a place that brings joy.**

**As your City Council member, I commit to fighting to restore the Parks budget to ensure they are properly maintained year-round. It's horrible that the budget was cut by \$87M during this pandemic. We felt and continue to feel the effects of the budget cut. The parks have become a sanctuary. We must fight to ensure our community has places that bring people together, provide joy and reprieve, and are vital to our quality of living.**

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?

**The health of our residents should be a top priority from all levels of government. We must provide better access to public transportation and green spaces that connect all communities together. As stated, I have a bigger vision to fix and replace the BQE with a green climate resilient and infrastructure plan that will improve our health and quality of life.**

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'm a member of my local community garden, Poplar Street Community Garden, and I understand the importance and need of gardens throughout the city. I will fight to ensure the gardens receive the funding that will help them maintain and sustainably be able to grow foods that can provide some additional fresh produce for families. In addition to that, I will advocate for more educational programs that revolve around food nutrition, how to get access to free foods, SNAP, etc.**

*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?

**We need to strike a balance because our small businesses still need access to the streets. If planned appropriately with community members, residents and local businesses - street pedestrianization can become the new norm and a place for gathering, reprieve and less traffic.**

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 Ave can become an open space that connects communities. We need to provide better public transportation to places that don't have easy access to it and encourage individuals to not drive. I will work with the Council, the Borough President and residents to come up with a concept that will benefit all and fight for the funding to see it come to fruition.**

*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 better city planning that marries safer bike and walking lanes that are protected from drivers and also provide high fines for trucks and any type of vehicle that blocks these areas.**

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?

**With my background in creating multi-million dollar partnerships with corporations and nonprofits, I can bring my expertise to the role and help secure funding and manpower to the park due to the economic setbacks that we have faced this past year. It's imperative that we leverage philanthropic, nonprofit, and private resources to help us support the parks. In addition to monetary funds, we need to communicate more effectively with our residents and get people more involved with fun events that are community driven, education and provide a sense of belonging for all.**

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're all in this together. I'm all about partnerships that benefit our community and its residents. Developers should have us at the table from the start and should give back to our communities in multiple ways to help us with continual revenue streams to ensure we combat climate change, maintain our open spaces and parks year round.**

**Some examples of ways we can garner funding:**

**Create a Conservancy that will provide membership support, educational programs, engagement with community members, and public financial support**

**I will advocate for a complete audit of the NYPD budget. I support measures to reduce wasteful spending and increase efficiency, reallocating up to \$1B of the current NYPD budget. A portion of the reallocation of dollars should go back into our parks and recreation to help with equitable access**

**The city matches contributions to individuals running for elected office. The city can implement a fundraising campaign like nonprofits do and have a matching gift program. For example, for every dollar of private money raised, the city will match it with a dollar of restored funding.**

**Renaming the Park(s), where a private company or philanthropist pays annually for the naming rights. For example, the Mets are receiving \$20 million annually from Citibank in exchange for naming the stadium Citi Field.**

**Have temporary seasonal resources/events for the community such as an ice skating rink during the winter months, where a public-private partnership is created. e.g. Bryant Park's Winter Village includes a corporate sponsor and small businesses that pay to be a part of the seasonal events.**