



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?

I wholeheartedly support the goal to get the City to commit to a goal of a minimum of 1% of its overall budget for maintenance and operations. I will ensure that these funds are equitable distributed by compiling a needs-assessment of all the parks in the district and pushing Parks to up their efforts in the most abandoned and least maintained parks first. For example, the Justice Ramirez Park on White Street is one of the most abandoned parks in the district, it would be my first priority.

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?

I believe we should rely on all available open spaces throughout the district. One of my proposals would be to work with city-funded housing non-profits in the district to make their open spaces available to their tenants.

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 Domino development is a good model of responsible development. The developer was able to build housing and in exchange the residents of North Brooklyn were able to get a beautiful waterfront park. The Rheingold property, while I opposed the luxury price tags, was another model example that we can mirror--building open space/parks on roofs.

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 look forward to collaborating with this organization to figure out where are the highest need locations. My plan to prioritize long overlooked spaces is to include them in the federal infrastructure funds that are coming down. Administratively, I'd like to have a two-year plan that would track progress and ensure that open space coalitions are included in lobbying efforts for these underserved parks. It will take us all working together to accomplish this goal.

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 in favor of these efforts. I would love to merge these efforts with other community-driven efforts throughout the community. As previously mentioned, the Justice Ramirez started by a White Street homeowner is a park that has been maintained by the local homeowners. We should work with these homeowners to put their vision into place with a bottom-up approach and not tell them what they need.

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?

Wherever the public is not included in the process, I will ensure that our office is a space to include community engagement.

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?

I would be interested in exploring greenhouse style parks throughout the district where the current open space we have is enclosed. The Justice Ramirez Park I keep mentioning is across the street from a cement mixing company that pushes lots of debris onto the park.

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?

Fishable, swimmable waterways are certainly possible but it will take lots of collaboration. The biggest effort that needs to occur for a successful reduction of CSOs is an education push. Individuals need to learn about the impact of flushing the wrong things, slowing down water usage when it rains, disposing harmful products the correct way, and other ways of keeping our water system clean.

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, but there should be community input from the local residents as to how this will be organized.

Equity & anti-racism

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

As mentioned, my goal will be to start with the most abandoned open spaces first. Over the last 20 years, we have pumped lots of money into open spaces in larger, more affluent areas at the expense of the overall community.

Moreover, I will fight to make all city owned parks in District 34 ADA approved. We will be the inclusive leaders in the city by incorporating swings for children in wheelchairs by collaborating with the neighbors and seeing if there is a need for these swings.

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 the waterfront has done a good job of being inclusive of all communities. As a person of color, I personally have never had any issues in these spaces. Emerging open spaces should be mindful of the surrounding communities. For example, the legalization of marijuana has commenced an interesting situation for parks where people are using parks to smoke recreationally with no regard for the families with kids utilizing the space.

It's one thing to be a pro-open space, it's another to be disregarding existing communities.

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

As previously mentioned, I would like to push housing non-profits to utilize their open space better. Particularly, giving their tenants access to those open spaces and use this land to add green life to it.

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?

COVID proves the need for more open space. These are the spaces to clear our minds, workout, breathe fresh air, and feel safe from the tense times we are living in.

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 best approach is to educate our communities about the importance of living healthy lifestyles (eating less salt, working out, eating right, etc.). This will build stronger immune systems and ease the effects of the pandemic.

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 set discretionary funds directly to these community gardens.

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?

I prefer to increase park spaces than to close out streets.

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 have to do more research. I am aware of the pollution of trucks in this area, and I would be open to a street redesign as long as it doesn't impact the manufacturing community or the residents living nearby. However, I will look into it before the forum.

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?

Work with the local community to ensure that the spaces are conducive for all impacted.

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?

Funding organizations like this is one avenue. We can have your organization hire people to clean the 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.

Yes. We should create a district-wide fund that developers put money into to maintain schools and open spaces.