

2021 CANDIDATES FORUM ORGANIZED BY
THE NORTH BROOKLYN OPEN SPACE COALITION



NCA
NEWTOWN CREEK ALLIANCE



NBO

Scott Murphy

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. I will ensure that funds are equitably by creating mandatory Council oversight for the distribution of funds, which may include geographical mapping of funding and analysis of neighborhood income. I plan to hold hearings if there is any indication that money is not being spent and distributed equitably.

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 think that POPS are fantastic, and that we should encourage them as much as possible. Creating space for public-private partnerships is extremely important, especially when open space in our city can be so limited. However, POPS should not be a replacement for investment into true public spaces and our parks. I intend to promote POPS where equitable and possible, and to push for increased funding for our public parks.

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?

I think this all starts with making targeted investments into areas like Southside Williamsburg. I think addressing inequities directly - by investing explicitly into areas that have been impacted by our former leaders' susception to corporate interests. As we address these public health issues that have developed, we can then move forward and center equity in further funding and decision-making.

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 first plan to hold a hearing with officials from Parks and Recreation (either through my own office, or through another Member who is on the correct committee) to discuss why this trend exists and how they plan to address it.

I then plan to work with community organizers and groups in the district to assess the needs of the community and determine which areas we need to focus on. I would work with other Council Members to draft legislation that would directly fund maintenance for the parks in most dire need, with a lens that ensures that distribution of maintenance funds is equitable.

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 a major proponent of open streets and spaces and green space - both of which our district greatly needs. I would champion these by working with community groups to put pressure on our Council to make some of our existing changes from the pandemic permanent, and to put funds into investing into more open and green spaces for the community.

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?

I think the more that we can allow actual community members to participate and own parts of the planning process, the better. All design work should be done with community input, as should scoping of park locations within communities.

We need to make this process equitable and engaging. One of the first steps to this is making sure that meetings and outreach materials are done in multiple languages and in forms that are accessible to those with disabilities. We need to hold meetings both during traditional working hours and after working hours to allow folks with nontraditional schedules to participate. We need to consult specifically with community groups as much as possible, and be truly open to feedback and transparent in the planning process as well.

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?

Understanding the effects of climate change means making our parks and spaces resilient to adverse weather events. This means making places resilient to storms, sea level rise (where applicable), and intense heat. We need to build retaining walls where necessary, and ensure that our parks and open spaces have proper drainage systems. We can use plants and trees that are also resilient to adverse weather, reducing the need to replace damaged vegetation.

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?

Combined Sewer Overflow is not going away anytime soon. I think we have to ramp up public education around the “Wait...” program. Continued expansion of the rain garden program, Green Infrastructure Grant Program, and ongoing oversight and support of the MS4 System.

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 would absolutely support this, with the caveat that there needs to be targeted investment into neighborhoods with fewer grocery stores and lack of access to produce. I think that growing food and composting can have major benefits in communities, and targeting communities who could benefit most should be a priority.

I also think pairing any legislation in this area with education on opportunities to participate and take skills home would be critical. Folks can learn to compost and grow in their own spaces in some cases, and this knowledge can benefit both community members and the environment.

Equity & anti-racism

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

I think ultimately this comes down to budget allocation, we need to ensure budgets are spent in a fair and equitable manner. In addition we need to disband the parks enforcement patrol and roll them up into my proposed public safety division of the NYPD (or a yet to be created community first responder department).

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?

Disband the Parks Enforcement Patrol, and roll that staff into a new division of the NYPD focused entirely on public safety, not enforcement.

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

No response from the candidate.

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?

No response from the candidate.

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?

No response from the candidate.

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?

No response from the candidate.

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?

Open Streets is a great step forward in encouraging people not to own cars and to seek other forms of transportation. While this transition is happening, we need to balance the need for parking with the greater need for equitable and safe open spaces. As I've said, I would divide the NYPD into 2 separate divisions, the largest of which would be entirely focused on public safety over enforcement.

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 is a mess that needs to be addressed - no one can deny that. The space doesn't serve anyone in the community well. I would propose an outside analysis be done by an independent transportation infrastructure firm with a focus on the best way to use the roadway and space under the BQE to best serve everyone in the community, not just drivers.

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?

No response from the candidate.

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.

No response from the candidate.