

CAMPAIGN FOR NEW YORK'S FUTURE

Open Space and Parks

“New York City has fewer acres of green space per person than almost any other major American city.”

—PlaNyC

Mayor Bloomberg has proposed that all New Yorkers should live within a 10-minute walk of a park by 2030. PlaNyC includes seven initiatives to increase open space and improve public health, recreational opportunities and quality of life. This fact sheet is prepared by the Campaign for New York's Future – a coalition of civic, business, environmental, labor, community and public health organizations – to answer some common questions about the Mayor's new parks and open space initiatives.

How is health affected by the amount of – and access to – park land?

Expanding access to parks and green space is critical for public health. Today, half of all New Yorkers are overweight or obese. The city's obesity rate among children is 24 percent, almost 10 percent above the national average. And, in 2000, children in New York City were almost twice as likely to be hospitalized for asthma as children in the U.S. as a whole. Across the boroughs, one million New Yorkers have asthma and three-quarter million have diabetes. Heart disease is the city's number one killer. Parks and open space that provide room for recreation and clean air are necessary to combat these epidemics.

Doesn't NYC already have a lot of parks, playgrounds and green spaces?

New York City residents have fewer acres of green spaces per person than almost any other city in the country. The City regularly fails to meet its own standard of providing at least 1.5 acres of park space for every 1,000 people and one playground for every 1,250 children. According to the City, 97 of 188 neighborhoods – most in low-income areas of the Bronx, Brooklyn and southeast Queens – have more than 1,250 children per playground.

The Trust for Public Land, a private, nonprofit conservation group, sets the standard of a minimum of 2.5 acres of parkland per 1,000 people, which is a ratio that 90 percent of city neighborhoods do not meet. In some communities, parkland is woefully inadequate: East Flatbush's 12,000 children, for example, share three playgrounds, and the neighborhood's 56,000 residents have access to 0.09 acres of park space per thousand people.

How will PlaNyC ensure all New Yorkers have easy access to parks and open spaces?

The City has developed three primary approaches to ensure that nearly every New Yorker lives within a 10-minute walk of a park by 2030:

1. *Make existing sites available to more New Yorkers.* This includes opening schoolyards across the city as public playgrounds, allowing athletic teams across the city to use existing fields and complexes, and completing at least one major underdeveloped park site in every borough.
2. *Expand usable hours at existing sites.* This includes converting asphalt sites into multi-purpose fields and installing new lighting that allows for nighttime use of existing fields.

3. *Re-imagine the public realm.* The City will create a new or enhance existing public plazas in every community and will green the cityscape through tree plantings and expanding the Greenstreets program.

How will public plazas be created in every community?

This strategy seeks to expand the Greenstreets program by working to create a “public plaza” in every community district. Greenings of the public realm not only provides essential environmental benefits to air quality, storm water runoff, and the Urban Heat Island Effect, it has also been demonstrated to increase property values, stimulate commercial activity and provide traffic calming benefits.

What will opening schoolyards as public playgrounds do?

The goal of opening up playgrounds and urging all school playgrounds to be open citywide would provide residents with additional public space greater than that of Central Park, which occupies 843 acres. This low-cost strategy would provide much needed play space for neighborhoods across the city. Currently, a significant majority of schoolyards operated by the NYC Department of Education remain closed and locked during the evenings and on weekends.

This initiative must include both construction and ongoing maintenance for it to succeed. Careful attention must be devoted to ensuring adequate maintenance and security for these spaces that does not place undue burden on individual schools.

Why green the cityscape?

PlaNYC seeks to expand the city’s tree canopy cover from 24 – 30 percent and sets out a goal of planting one million trees by 2030. This too will have significant benefits for air quality, storm water runoff, and the Urban Heat Island Effect, and will promote increased property values, stimulate commercial activity and provide traffic calming benefits.

How much will it cost?

PlaNYC lays out a price tag for several key initiatives at close to \$1 billion over the next 10 years.

For more information, visit www.CampaignForNewYork.org.

The Campaign for New York’s Future is a coalition of civic, business, environmental, labor, community and public health organizations that support the goals and strategic direction of PlaNYC. Our goal is to make every neighborhood in NYC a great place to live and work, as well as make a significant contribution to fighting climate change. The coalition aims to encourage public debate — as well as fair and effective action — now and in the years to come. We recognize the need to both seize the opportunity for immediate action and to insure that this long-term plan evolves with continued dialogue and changing conditions.