



A FUTURE OF PLAY REOPENING NYC FOR OUR KIDS

Scott Stringer believes that every child should have a neighborhood playground and park. As Mayor, he'll build more than 200 new playgrounds across the five boroughs, so every New Yorker lives within walking distance of a park or playground by 2025.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, playgrounds, parks, open streets, and greenspaces have been lifelines to New Yorkers. But the ability to get out, breath fresh air, and gather with friends and family outdoors is not equal across the city.

On the whole, New York City has too few playgrounds: just one for every 5,000 residents, ranking our City behind 47 others in the United States – including Boston, Minneapolis, and Louisville. Meanwhile, many playgrounds are inaccessible to the public or in poor conditions. Neighborhoods like Borough Park, Bensonhurst, and Jackson Heights are the most underserved, even though there are more children living in these areas than anywhere else. The neighborhoods with the fewest parks are often lacking any greenspace, situated in the shadows of highways and choking on pollution, in predominantly lower income communities and communities of color outside of Manhattan.

Scott Stringer grew up playing stickball on the street, climbing the jungle gyms in New York City playgrounds, and tossing the football in local parks with the dream of becoming the quarterback for the New York Jets. Now, he brings his two sons, Max and Miles, to the same playgrounds and parks between remote learning and in-person classes.

As Mayor, Scott will make New York the greatest city to raise a family, with comprehensive and nation-leading plans to make child care affordable for all working families, build deeply affordable housing in every neighborhood, provide the highest quality education in our public schools from elementary to CUNY, ensure all students have access to afterschool and summer jobs, and deliver a comprehensive Green New Deal to take-on the fight of our lives: climate change.

And just as important, in Scott Stringer's New York, every child will have a fun, safe, and green place to play.

Scott will build 200 new playgrounds using the Schoolyards to Playgrounds and mid-block playground model, address gaping disparities in our city neighborhoods, increase the number of public bathrooms and changing stations, and dramatically improve maintenance and conditions of existing playgrounds and parks by nearly doubling the operating budget of park to a full 1% of the City budget.

- 1. OPEN UP SCHOOLYARDS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD KIDS.** As Mayor, Scott will double down on the City's "Schoolyards to Playgrounds" initiatives with a goal of breaking ground on an additional 100 playgrounds, specifically in neighborhoods in the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn where there has been a tremendous increase in the number of young children and a lack of existing playground space. He will work with DOE, Parks, public school students and nonprofit partners to dramatically upgrade these school yards (which are often barren asphalt lots), add play equipment and other amenities, invest in outdoor learning facilities, and open them up to communities in the early evenings and on the weekends.

2. PEDESTRIANIZE HUNDREDS OF STREETS AND BUILD PERMANENT

PLAYGROUNDS. As Mayor, Scott will create a vast system of “shared streets” in residential neighborhoods and build at least 100 mid-block playgrounds -- as well as dog parks, plazas, skate parks, and community gardens -- by closing off blocks to through-traffic and dramatically reclaiming space for pedestrians, bikes, and community-uses. This “Pavement to Playgrounds” model has been in place for five decades on St. Marks Avenue in Crown Heights, Brooklyn and will be introduced in every community in New York City.¹

In addition, Scott will pedestrianize blocks in front of more than 100 schools across the city, allowing for safer gathering of students and drop-offs and installing bike racks, benches, planters, and play equipment. This will be part of Scott’s ambitious bike-to-school plan, which will install secure bike parking around every school, build 75 miles of protected bike lanes around public high schools, and provide free Citi-Bike memberships for high school students.

3. ENSURE EQUITY AND GUARANTEE THAT EVERY NEW YORKER LIVES WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE OF A PARK BY 2025.

Nearly 1.5 million New Yorkers are further than a walk to a park -- with many of the largest “park deserts” in Williamsbridge, Morris Park, Flatbush, Canarsie, Midwood, Ozone Park, Astoria, and Elmhurst.² Moreover, lower-income and BIPOC communities are more likely to live near smaller parks that are prone to overcrowding.

This must change. As Mayor, Scott will make sure that *every* New Yorker lives within walking distance of a park by the end of his first term, prioritizing Schoolyard-to-Playground and mid-block playground build outs in underserved communities.

4. GUARANTEE THAT EVERY PARK AND PLAYGROUND HAS A BATHROOM AND CHANGING STATION BY 2029. For children and young families, the value of a park or playground is severely diminished if it lacks a bathroom or changing station. Having to constantly scurry home in a rush is no way to enjoy the park. Unfortunately, only 40 percent of the City’s 1,700 parks, playgrounds, and recreation facilities include a comfort station and only 27 percent of these bathrooms have changing tables.

As Mayor, Scott will install a bathroom and changing table at every Parks Department facility by 2029 – and increase the existing number of bathrooms in larger parks. He will expedite this process by following the lead of Governor’s Island and Domino Park, installing modern, clean, trailer bathrooms at the curb space adjacent to community parks and playgrounds and within larger city parks.

5. BRING PARKS FUNDING TO 1% OF THE CITY BUDGET, DOUBLING DOWN ON PARKS DEPARTMENT MAINTENANCE AND SANITATION, INCREASING AGENCY STAFFING, AND IMPROVING THE EMPLOYMENT PIPELINE FOR LOCAL NEW YORKERS. According to the Center for an Urban Future, the Parks Department’s full-time headcount is 35 percent *lower* than it was in the early-1970s. This understaffing is reflected in the substandard conditions of many playgrounds, comfort stations, drainage systems, walkways, bridges, and retaining walls, declining lawn and horticultural upkeep, and overflowing garbage cans.

In 2018, NYC Parks deemed 159 playgrounds to be “unacceptable” due to a) multiple features being unsatisfactory, b) one feature having a serious safety hazard, or c) the playground having a failed cleanliness rating. Most of these hazardous playgrounds were in Brooklyn, where 24% were deemed “unacceptable” by NYC Parks.³

As Mayor, Scott will put an end to these maintenance deficiencies, increasing the Parks operating budget to hire more gardeners and foresters, masons, plumbers, electricians, mechanics, and sanitation workers. As part of this effort, he will also revamp the Parks Opportunity Program so that it is not just providing short-term jobs for Department of Social Services clients, but a career pathway to full-time employment with the Parks Department.

Ultimately, Scott will bring the Parks Department operating budget to 1% of the City Budget, in line with cities like Minneapolis and San Francisco, which are well known for their impeccable facilities. He will set ironclad maintenance standards for parks and playgrounds and ensure that sufficient funding is in place to achieve these goals.

- 6. CONDUCT A FULL INVENTORY OF NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS TO ENSURE THAT THEIR OFFERINGS REFLECT COMMUNITY NEEDS.** Over the years, as neighborhood demographics and tastes change, certain park facilities and offerings fall out of favor while others become increasingly popular. Soccer fields, skate parks, dog parks, and pickleball, for instance, are currently in high demand, while interest in other sports and activities has waned.

To ensure that facilities, amenities, and activities reflect local needs, Scott will have the Parks Department conduct a full audit of its neighborhood parks, survey local residents, and create a short-, mid-, and long-term plan to modify and redesign parks in order to match local interests and to address any disparities from borough to borough and neighborhood to neighborhood.

- 7. ENSURE THE PLAYGROUNDS SERVE NEW YORKERS OF ALL AGES.** While playgrounds are generally designed for a very specific age group — whether toddler, pre-school, or school-age — NYC Parks does little to classify, track, or communicate the target age of their facilities. Moving forward, NYC Parks maps, apps, directories, and inventories should designate the age group that each of its

playground facilities was designed for and, using this information, address gaps in their playground inventory to ensure there are sufficient age-appropriate facilities for all New York City children.

8. **GREEN PLAYGROUNDS AND PARKS FOR ALL SEASONS.** Playgrounds and the areas around them too often become inaccessible or hazardous after snowstorms or other weather events – but they do not have to be. Scott will invest in innovative design and resilient, all-season fauna to winterize playgrounds and parks, so that our outdoor spaces are accessible all year round. Moreover, Scott will invest in transforming school yards, playgrounds, parks, and other outdoor spaces to prioritize climate resilience – such as rainwater absorption – to move the needle on climate change solutions, improve air and harbor quality, and combat the heat island effect and other extreme climate conditions in our neighborhoods.

9. **RELAUNCH PARK “HAPPENINGS.”** Former Parks Department Commissioner Thomas Hoving was famous for his “happenings,” or large-scale public events that drew in New Yorkers of all ages. Working with staff and multiple artists-in-residence, the Parks Department held go-go dancing competitions, kite flying exhibitions, winter carnivals, folk singing events, costume parties, and an art event where participants painted on a canvas that stretched hundreds of feet.

It is time to resurrect this spirit of the 1960s and relaunch major city-wide events in parks throughout the five boroughs. From the quirky to the mainstream, e-sports to physical sports, the Department of Parks will actively engage young children, teenagers, and adults, bringing New Yorkers together and into our public spaces.

10. FREE SUNSCREEN AT PARKS, PLAYGROUNDS, POOLS, AND CITY BEACHES.

Building on a pilot program pioneered by Comptroller Stringer in partnership with the Parks Department, IMPACT Melanoma, and Bright Guard, as Mayor, Scott will install hundreds of free sunscreen dispensers at City beaches, parks, pools, and playgrounds to ensure all New Yorkers are able to enjoy the outdoors and protect themselves from preventable skin cancers.⁴

11. ACCELERATE THE CONSTRUCTION PROCESS BY EMPOWERING THE PARKS DEPARTMENT AND CREATING AN OFFICE OF PUBLIC SPACE.

As Mayor, Scott will streamline the capital planning, contracting, design, engineering, and construction process in order to deliver on his ambitious goals. His administration will fully fund the Parks Department's capital needs assessment, track capital projects more closely, accelerate the OMB approval process, and scale back the responsibilities of the Department of Design and Construction. Instead of waiting in the queue alongside library, hospital, and sanitation projects, the Parks Department will be empowered to manage on-call contracts, using trusted construction firms for standardized, recurring capital projects.

Scott will also create a new Mayor's Office of Public Space to issue construction permits, coordinate agency activities, and champion street redesigns – including the massive expansion of mid-block playgrounds, slow streets, dog parks, skate parks, plazas, and other neighborhood community spaces.

Finally, as part of this effort, Scott will revisit some Bloomberg-era reforms that shifted liability and maintenance responsibilities for street and sidewalk space from the City to residential building owners and businesses. These changes have had a chilling effect on street redesigns and should be reconsidered. Whether mid-block playgrounds, open streets, curb extensions, crosswalks, or bus stops, the City must take greater ownership over maintenance and improvements.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/state-of-play-a-new-model-for-nyc-playgrounds/#Recommendations>
- 2 <https://www.nycgovparks.org/planning-and-building/planning/walk-to-a-park>
- 3 <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/state-of-play-a-new-model-for-nyc-playgrounds/>
- 4 <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/city-adopts-comptroller-stringers-proposal-to-provide-free-sunscreen-dispensers-at-all-city-beaches/>