



*Urban Outdoors is the Newsletter of Neighborhood Open Space Coalition (NOSC). It is published periodically to keep New Yorkers informed of issues and information relating to their public space system. For more information about NOSC visit [www.treebranch.net](http://www.treebranch.net).*

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## **A Parkie's 10 Ideas for a More Sustainable New York**

The Mayor's office invited NOSC (and other public space advocates) down to City Hall for a chat about "2030" and sustainability a couple of weeks before the big policy speech at the Queens Museum, in which he announced outlines of a planning document that can lead to solutions to problems created by a quickly expanded population. We focused our ideas to those that could preserve and provide quality public space, as that is our mission, and left other ideas for others to present.

None of the following 10 ideas are new. They represent a look at the cityscape from the perspective of an organization that has put more than 30 years into building a more humane city. We believe that an "open space" perspective on ideas that have been contributed by participants in other disciplines can help round out a view of interventions that the Office of Sustainability is probably already considering.

1. **IMPROVING BICYCLE TRANSPORTATION IN NEW YORK**, including extending landscaped greenways out of parks and into streetscapes, continues to be fundable and doable. Bridge paths over non-accessible bridges are a must-do. DOT must be encouraged to make the greenways program a higher priority, perhaps by grouping the whole system into one planning study and developing interim and long-term interventions. NOSC pioneered Greenway planning with the classic Brooklyn-Queens Greenway Study. NOSC turned in an inventory of potential greenways, which with minor changes became the City's Greenways Plan. NOSC also worked for the early funding of greenways with an expanded federal transportation program
2. **TREES AND LANDSCAPING** turn greenhouse carbon and other exhaust chemicals into bark, leaves and living plant tissue. Trees help to cool city surface temperatures, reduce violent crime and increase real estate values. We should look at street reconstruction projects carefully to find places where we can narrow streets and widen

tree pits without causing congestion. There also need to be some hoops that DOT must jump through before streets are widened at the expense of tree space. We need to reduce impediments to low-cost tree planting, perhaps by allowing NYC Parks to plant trees wherever they can unless building owners have opted-out by internet. (A request FOR a tree is presently required) We must also find ways to encourage absentee landlords to stop being disinterested in tree planting.

3. **PUTTING RAINWATER INTO AQUIFERS** is less costly and less damaging than putting rain into sewers. We must find ways to help our ground to absorb water. Chicago style extended tree pits and curb gardens, center traffic islands, more GreenStreet triangles, and using water permeable concrete and asphalt and green edges on parking lots, playgrounds, sports courts, school yards and parks would be a good start. Water from New York's underground aquifers can be used to keep parks, cemeteries, and other public spaces green, even in drought years.
4. **LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION CUTS TRANSPORTATION COSTS** and homegrown food tastes better. NYC Parks, Land Trusts and NYCHA have excellent community gardening programs. Gardening is also among America's most popular pastimes and physical activities. We need to find new ways to encourage community gardening on land controlled by all city agencies.
5. **NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLYARDS** are an ecological disaster. Kids learn better in a greener environment. A program of greening of Department of Education property can be an important learning exercise.
6. **DECENTRALIZED COMPOSTING** reduces transportation costs but also reduces available parkland in a city that is woefully underserved. There have been complaints of lost parkland at City composting sites. We have yet to come up with an incentive program that will encourage backyard composting and community garden composting, but even without incentives, continuing education to New Yorkers will reap rewards.
7. **A SUSTAINABLE CITY IS ONE THAT ENCOURAGES** walking and the use of public transport. Walking is the one physical activity that almost everyone can do, but many seniors need frequent resting places, and the rest of us need resting places once in a while and when we are overloaded with packages. Each four-corner pedestrian intersection should have at least one bench, a tree and a water fountain near a fire hydrant. This small change in the way we think of our city can happen without a big expensive planning study. It can start incrementally on BID streets and other shopping streets. In some cases a parking space or two may need to be necked down for a sidewalk addition. More walkers will reduce medical costs, medical infrastructure costs etc.
8. **PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION NEEDS TO MOVE** more quickly than private transportation. Bus rapid transit can be NY's first new transit system in more than fifty years but it requires separate street and highway right of ways to succeed. As congestion is reduced by increased transit use, further reallocation of street space for wider sidewalks and tree plantings can proceed. To reduce carbon emissions, one of the goals of the 2030 plan, car-use must be reduced. Congestion pricing, linked with bus rapid transit are solutions that can be implemented before the Mayor leaves office.

9. **INCREMENTAL UPZONING TO ENCOURAGE HAT-HOUSES** (small scale additions on rooftops) can reap big dividends in the provision of unique and visually interesting housing while allowing for re-thinking of policies that turn public land over to developers. What little unused public land we have left may be more valuable as public space than any other use if the cost of infrastructure to support development and environmental benefits of open space are included.
10. **PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF THE PROGRAMS** for a more sustainable city will require the work of public and private non-profit agencies. Funding sources must be found to green our city and to educate New Yorkers of the importance of the changes that need to be made. NOSC has argued in public forums for a 15-cent fee of plastic shopping bags to fund urban environmental programs. Upon learning of the failure of the Irish precedent to provide the anticipated income, (A 20 cent fee was imposed but people brought their own bags to stores,) we expanded our proposal to include plastic fast food containers. Among the first expressions of support for our suggestion was one from a major supermarket chain. Proposals to model a tax on the one in Ireland are floating around in California, Washington State, Australia, and Scotland, among other places.

Those are the 10 modest proposals that we brought with us to the Mayor's office. We welcome comment on the [cyberpark list](#). I hope to collect our readers response and post it to our website. The Mayor is also looking for ideas to be posted on the [City's website](#).

### *More from the Coalition:*

#### **Malfeasance at NYC Parks?**

We have written about misuse of Spring Creek Park in the past. We thought that with the closing of the composting operation there things might get better. Not so. Here's a link: [Click here: The Brooklyn Rail - Spring Creep](#)