



2006 PROGRESS REPORT ON NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

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*Progress Report on Neighborhood Parks***



WHY A PROGRESS REPORT ON NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS?

New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P) has documented a disparity in the conditions of neighborhood parks for the past four years through its annual, award-winning *Report Card on Parks*. This progress report takes a closer look at the highest and lowest performing parks from 2005 and measures their conditions in 2006.¹ This survey design allows NY4P to track changes in specific high and low performing parks in order to highlight successes, identify challenges, and continue to enhance the policy discussion on NYC’s parks. Generally, NY4P found that the best performing parks remained in excellent condition or declined in score, while the poorest performing parks continue to receive “F” grades.

NY4P has been documenting the conditions of NYC’s neighborhood parks since the summer of 2002 through the annual *Report Card on Parks*, the only citywide, independent evaluation of neighborhood parks, which was honored as an outstanding community indicators project by the Brookings Institution in 2005. *The Progress Report on Neighborhood Parks* is a follow-up study undertaken during the summer of 2006. For this study, NY4P surveyors re-inspected 2005’s ten highest and ten lowest performing parks to measure progress.

The *Report Card on Parks* has historically evaluated 200 neighborhood parks on eight major service areas (MSAs): Playgrounds, Active Recreation, Sitting Areas, Pathways, Passive Greenspace, Bathrooms, Drinking Fountains, and the Immediate Environment. While overall scores have improved since the first *Report Card* in 2003, more than 40% of neighborhood parks were still receiving a C, D, or F in the 2005 study.

During the summer of 2006, NY4P found that five of 2005’s highest performing parks remained in excellent condition; the other five “A” parks slipped in score; and the ten poorest performing parks continued to receive “F” grades.

Over the past 20 years, the Parks Department’s staffing has been cut by 60% and its funding by 20%. And yet, this chronically underfunded agency is responsible for maintaining more than 28,800 acres of parkland in NYC – 14% of the city’s land cover. NY4P recommends increased maintenance and staffing, expedited capital improvements, and expanded community stewardship to ensure that every park can become an “A+” park.



Theodore Roosevelt Park, Manhattan, 2006. These lawns, immaculately groomed and landscaped, border the American Museum of Natural History.



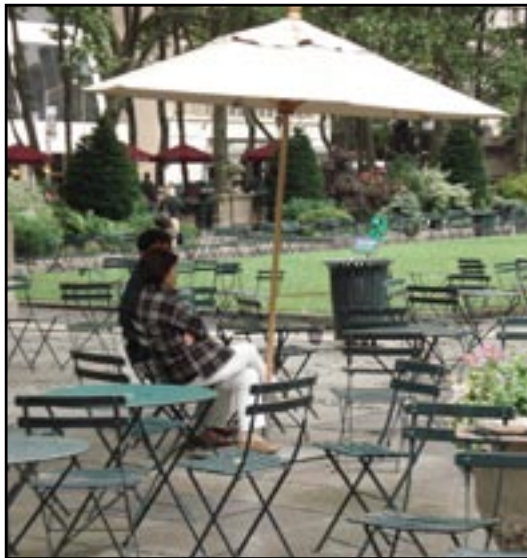
Tremont Park, Bronx, 2006. A large, dead branch obstructs this lawn, creating a trip hazard.

¹ Data for the 2005 *Report Card on Parks* was collected during the summer of 2004.

FINDINGS



Harlem River Drive Park, Manhattan, 2006. This park received an “F” in 2005 and 2006. This dangerous sitting area, which borders the baseball field, is unacceptable.



Bryant Park, Manhattan, 2006. Bryant Park, privately funded and managed by the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation, has been the top performing park in every *Report Card on Parks*.

Five of the city’s ten best scoring parks in 2005 remained “A” parks in 2006. Particularly notable is that drinking fountains, which are generally in poor condition citywide, scored a 100% in each of these parks (with the exception of Damrosch Park, which has no drinking fountains). Bathrooms and immediate environment also performed exceptionally well in these five sites. All of the parks in this group – Bryant, City Hall, Madison Square, Theodore Roosevelt, and Damrosch – located in Manhattan, benefit from private support

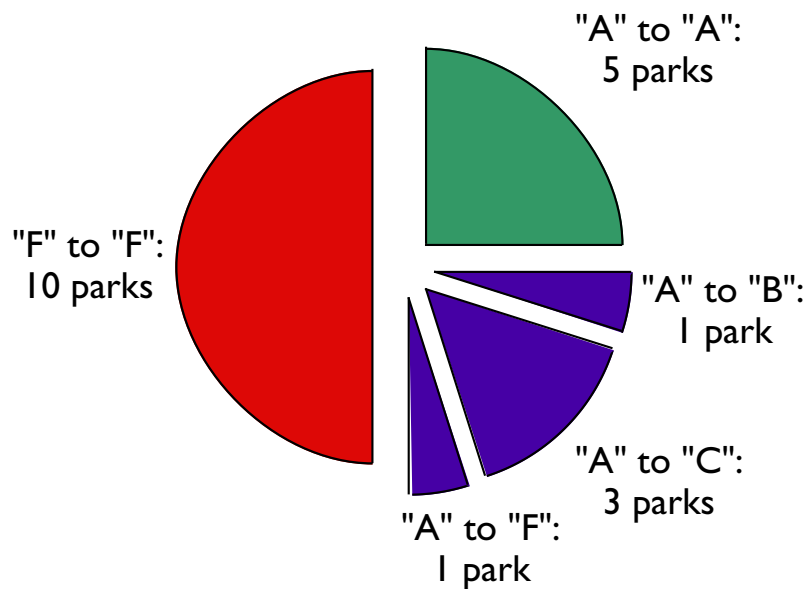
Five of the “top ten” sites from 2005 slipped by at least 15 points in 2006. These parks’ scores were generally impacted by the presence of weeds, debris, dying trees, and overgrown lawns. Alice Austen Park, Father Macris Park, Corporal Thompson Park and Columbus Park all dropped from the “A+” range to the “B” and “C” range. Tenney Park’s score dropped particularly severely in 2006, primarily due to poor maintenance, with litter and broken glass affecting several features. What was a well maintained park in 2005 appeared neglected in 2006 – a result of inconsistent maintenance. These “fluctuating” parks are all in the other boroughs.

In every case, parks that were in the “bottom ten” in 2005 received “F” grades in 2006 as well. Sitting areas, active recreation, drinking fountains and passive greenspace were generally in poor condition at these sites. Although capital investments are needed to significantly improve some features, staff supervision would certainly lead to better conditions in the short term.

Some “F” parks showed improvement or remained steady in 2006, including Sperandeo Brothers Playground, Harlem River Drive Park, Co-Op City Field, Quarry Ballfield, and Tremont Park. Unfortunately, others have essentially hit the bottom, unable to perform much worse than they did this summer. University Woods, Corlears Hook Park, Martinez Playground, Irving Square Park, and Coney Island Creek Park routinely fail every feature for critical issues, including dead animals and excessive broken glass and debris. Unlike the majority of the top ten sites, none of these parks has received capital funding in the last eight years.² The decaying infrastructure of these parks must be replaced before their scores can be expected to rise much above the “F” range.

² NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/your_park.html. Capital projects information for all “bottom ten” and “top ten” sites compiled from “Your Park”.

Breakdown of change in grades from 2005 to 2006*



- Parks that received F's in 2005 & 2006
- Parks that received A's in 2005 & 2006
- Parks that received A's in 2005 & fluctuated in 2006

* Each grade listed in the chart includes the minus, standard, and plus. For example, "A" parks include those that received A-, A, or A+.

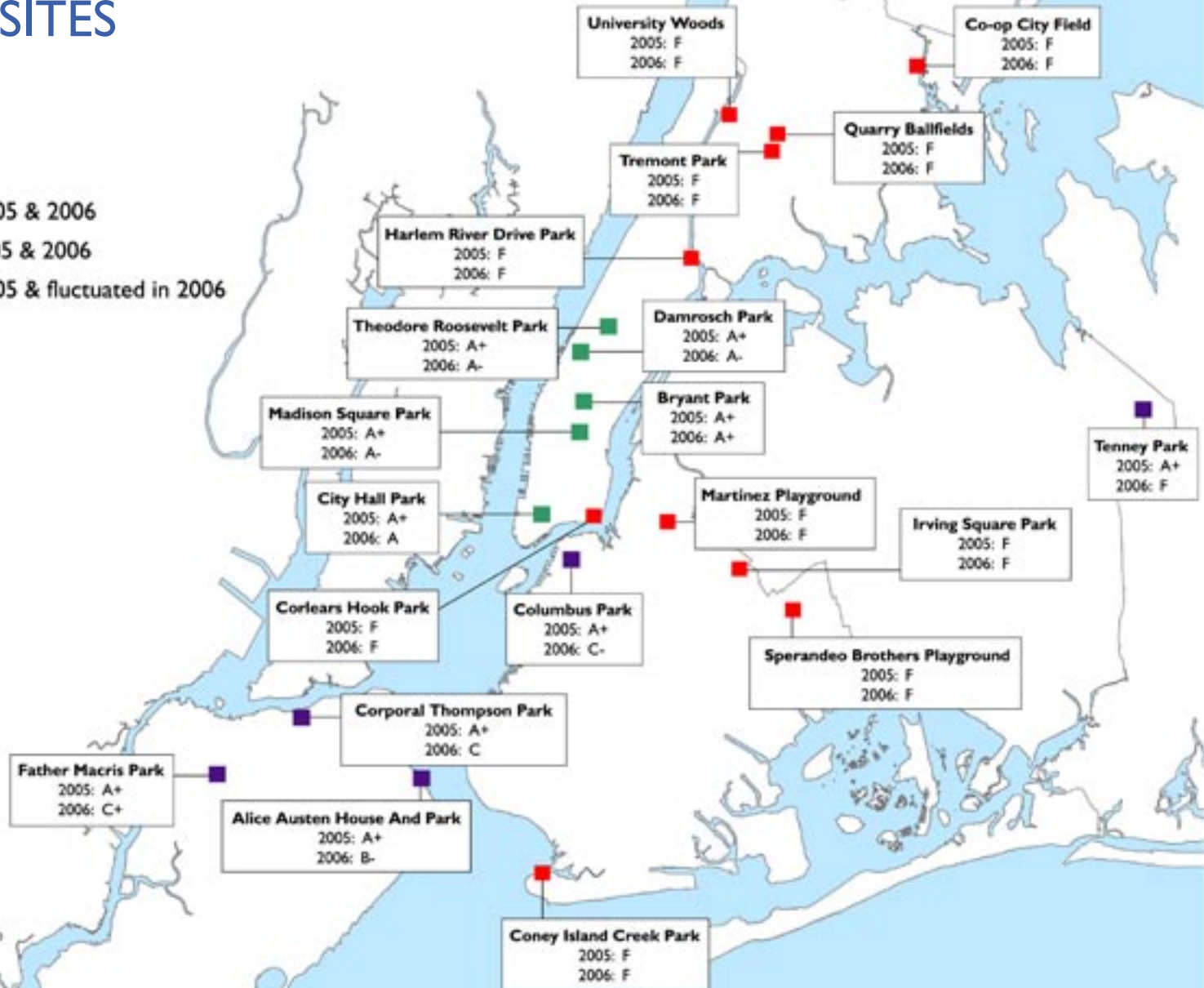
FIND YOUR PARK

Borough	Park Name	2006 Grade	2005 Grade	CD	Neighborhood	CB
Staten Island	ALICE AUSTEN HOUSE & PARK	80 (B-)	99 (A+)	49	Rosebank	SI1
Manhattan	BRYANT PARK	97 (A+)	100 (A+)	3	Times Square	M5
Manhattan	CITY HALL PARK	94 (A)	98 (A+)	1	City Hall	M11
Brooklyn	COLUMBUS PARK	70 (C-)	99 (A+)	33	Downtown Brooklyn	Bk2
Brooklyn	CONEY ISLAND CREEK PARK	28 (F)	33 (F)	47	Sea Gate	Bk13
Bronx	CO-OP CITY FIELD	40 (F)	35 (F)	12	Co-op City	Bx10
Manhattan	CORLEARS HOOK PARK	34 (F)	45 (F)	2	Lower East Side	M3
Staten Island	CPL THOMPSON PARK	75 (C)	98 (A+)	49	Livingston	SI1
Manhattan	DAMROSCH PARK	90 (A-)	99 (A+)	6	Lincoln Square	M7
Staten Island	FATHER MACRIS PARK	78 (C+)	98 (A+)	50	Graniteville	SI2
Manhattan	HARLEM RIVER DRIVE PARK	34 (F)	28 (F)	8	East Harlem/Yorkville	M11
Brooklyn	IRVING SQUARE PARK	22 (F)	39 (F)	37	Bushwick	Bk4
Manhattan	MADISON SQUARE PARK	90 (A-)	100 (A+)	3	Flatiron	M5
Brooklyn	MARTINEZ PLAYGROUND	10 (F)	13 (F)	34	East Williamsburg	Bk1
Bronx	QUARRY BALLFIELDS	43 (F)	33 (F)	15	East Tremont	Bx6
Brooklyn	SPERANDEO BROTHERS PLAYGROUND	40 (F)	9 (F)	37	Highland Park	Bk5
Queens	TENNEY PARK	43 (F)	98 (A+)	23	Glen Oaks	Q13
Manhattan	THEODORE ROOSEVELT PARK	92 (A-)	99 (A+)	6	Upper West Side	M7
Bronx	TREMONT PARK	48 (F)	48 (F)	15	East Tremont	Bx6
Bronx	UNIVERSITY WOODS	6 (F)	6 (F)	14	University Heights	Bx5

CD = New York City Council District
 CB = Community Board

2006 SURVEY SITES

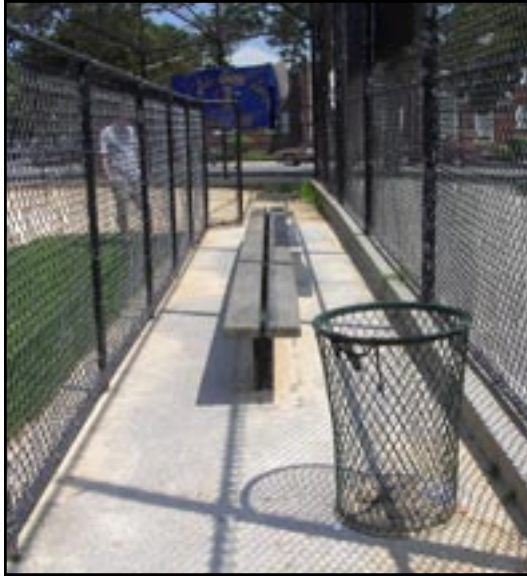
- Parks that received A's in 2005 & 2006
- Parks that received F's in 2005 & 2006
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0 1 2 4 Miles



CONCLUSIONS



Tenney Park, Queens, 2005. These ballfields were litter-free and well maintained in 2005.



Tenney Park, Queens, 2006. Overflowing trash cans and resulting litter affected several features in Tenney Park in 2006.

Five of the best performing parks of 2005 scored highly again in 2006, benefiting from consistent maintenance and, frequently, from dedicated staff members and volunteer groups who provide supplemental care for the parks and advocate on their behalf. This additional support seems to provide a stabilizing element to these parks, making them less dependent on cyclical public maintenance.

As evidenced by the five parks that slipped from “A” grades in 2005 to B’s, C’s or F’s in 2006, **consistent maintenance remains a challenge**. Even parks that tend to score well have the capacity to perform poorly, due to inconsistent care. High scores can tumble when litter, excessive weeds, and graffiti are not addressed in a timely manner.

The lowest performing parks from 2005, unfortunately, continued to earn “F” grades in 2006. **These parks require expedited capital improvements** as well as doubled maintenance attention to ensure that they reach their potential, providing for the community green, safe and clean places for play and relaxation.

Bryant Park and others have shown that **dedicated staff members can help to ensure regular maintenance**. However, due to declines in the Parks Department’s staff and budget over the last 20 years, only a handful of parks benefit from dedicated staff. Launched in 2005, the Neighborhood Parks Initiative (NPI), a public-private partnership among the City, Central Park Conservancy, New Yorkers for Parks, and City Parks Foundation, has worked to increase staffing by leveraging public and private funding to place full-time gardeners into some of the neediest parks across the city. Funding for this program should be expanded so that more parks can benefit from the supervision and horticultural expertise of gardeners. Thanks to the City Council and the Mayor, the FY 2007 Adopted Budget provides \$1.5 million to increase the staff of full-time gardeners by more than 50%.

Increased public funding is an essential piece in working toward improved park conditions. Despite the increases in DPR’s budget in recent years, NYC is still below the national average in terms of parks spending.³ Through its particular arrangement, Bryant Park keeps the money that it earns through concessions to pay operational costs. However, the \$70 million that is generated annually through concessions in parks citywide is funneled to the city’s General Fund. To enhance funding, the Parks Department should be able to keep this revenue for the maintenance of our parks, so that every park receives sufficient and consistent care.

³ Harnik, Peter. Center for City Park Excellence at the Trust for Public Land. 2006.

NY4P RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Clean parks twice a day between April and October.

The Parks Department's stated level of maintenance is once-a-day cleaning. Clearly, many parks continue to struggle despite this level of maintenance and require additional care. NY4P calls on the Parks Department to double the maintenance for the city's neighborhood parks by cleaning twice a day during their season of heaviest use. Though capital projects are important to the success of several of these sites, such projects can take years to plan and complete. In the interim, doubled maintenance will help to address the need for clean, safe and green parks. This level of care will help to stabilize those parks whose grades fluctuate from year to year.

2. Provide a full-time gardener in every community district.

Passive Greenspace scores, which include evaluations of lawns and trees, slipped for many of the *Progress Report* sites, showing the need for additional horticultural staff, who beautify and provide maintenance in parks. The Mayor and City Council have supported the Neighborhood Parks Initiative (NPI) by increasing the number of full-time gardeners in the city. These gardeners should be made standard in the city budget, and in addition, the city should work to ensure that each of the 59 community boards is assigned one full-time gardener to be deployed based on need.

3. Expedite targeted capital improvements.

The worst performing parks in the *Progress Report* can improve only so much before they require capital renovations. Martinez Playground contains deteriorated handball courts and drinking fountains that have been filled with cement. University Woods requires heavy landscaping, debris removal and pathway renovations before it will be considered a safe, clean neighborhood park. Capital projects must prioritize the parks most in need and should be expedited to minimize the time that communities must suffer with failing parks.

4. Enhance stewardship in the boroughs to increase community involvement and private support, with leadership from the Borough Presidents.

NY4P calls on the Borough Presidents to encourage and foster community stewardship of parks. Borough Presidents should encourage the formation of "friends of" organizations, and should use the successes of the City Parks Foundation as a model. The majority of the ten lowest performing sites, including Tremont Park and Sperandeo Brothers Playground, have no "friends of" group associated with them. Such groups work as advocates for their parks, notifying the parks department when maintenance attention is needed and organizing volunteer beautification projects.

The *Progress Report on Neighborhood Parks* illustrates the success of public-private partnerships and new management and funding models, and shows the need for consistent maintenance of all parks across the city. Though the highest performing parks continually score well, they often benefit from supplemental care and funding. Mid and low performing parks, which generally rely on public funding alone, suffer from fluctuating maintenance levels. Doubled maintenance, increased gardeners, expedited capital improvements, and expanded stewardship are necessary to ensure that all parks receive the care they need to become "A+" parks.



Tremont Park, Bronx, 2006. This pathway, full of trip hazards and weeds, is in need of repair.



Madison Square Park, Manhattan, 2006. Well-maintained pathways and lawns helped to earn this park an "A-".

SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGY – Progress Report on Neighborhood Parks



Irving Square Park, Brooklyn, 2006. This drinking fountain in Irving Square Park provides no relief for park users.



City Hall Park, Manhattan, 2006. This drinking fountain, in perfect condition, is a great asset to the park.

This report is intended as a follow up to the award-winning New Yorkers for Parks 2003, 2004 and 2005 *Report Card on Parks*, and the *Mini Report Card on Parks*. Below is a summary of the methodology constructed for this report.

Survey Population

Historically, the *Report Card* universe has been focused on DPR “park” properties of between one and 20 acres, as these properties represent New York City’s neighborhood parks. In 2005, this comprised 220 small to mid-size parks. Out of these, NY4P did not survey those parks that were closed for capital improvement. Further, certain park properties, like skating rinks, amusement parks or forests with no user trails have none of the Report Card’s Major Service Areas and were dropped from consideration in this report. The final survey universe in 2005 consisted of 190 park properties. The parks revisited and analyzed for the 2006 *Progress Report on Neighborhood Parks* include the ten highest and lowest scoring parks that were evaluated in the 2005 *Report Card on Parks*.

Grading the Parks

NY4P convened a focus group of park experts and community leaders to help define the eight Major Service Areas (MSA), along with a scale of weights to reflect the relative importance of different indicators. MSAs were weighted on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the most important to a park user’s experience). These service areas were evaluated on maintenance, cleanliness, safety and structural integrity. Thus, for each of the 190 parks included in the survey, every applicable MSA was assigned a numerical score. A park’s overall numerical score was calculated as a weighted average of these service area scores. The numerical scores were then converted to a final letter grade.

Each park was assigned a numerical score from 0 to 100 in each applicable MSA, based on the proportion of features in those service areas found to be in acceptable condition. This

Raw Numerical Grade	Letter Grade
97-100	A+
93-96	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
60-69	D
59 and below	F

Score/Grade associations developed by a focus group of park managers and open space experts.

was done using an independently developed survey mechanism that is based on the DPR's Parks Inspection Program (PIP). Next, MSA scores were averaged by weight to give an overall numerical park score. (Those parks lacking one or more of the MSAs were not penalized.) Letter grades corresponding to these numerical scores comprise the final park ratings in accordance with the conversion table on page 8.

The survey is designed to fairly rate all features that are or should be available to a user visiting a park. By way of example, if a park has a bathroom facility that is locked or closed without explanation, it receives a "0" for the bathroom rating. If the park does not have a bathroom, it does not receive a score for bathrooms, so that a park is never be penalized for not having a particular Major Service Area.

Survey Mechanism

NY4P uses a comprehensive survey mechanism developed specifically for the *Report Card on Parks* to determine a park's rating. There are 8 Major Service Areas tracked through the survey mechanism that breakdown into 12 feature forms. Surveyors complete a survey feature form for each of the features found in a park. For example, if there are three drinking fountains in a park, a surveyor completes three 'Drinking Fountain' forms. Surveyors answer a series of questions on the maintenance, cleanliness, safety and structural integrity of a feature. The total park score is based on the percentage of features evaluated that are found in acceptable condition.

Survey Work

Finally, NY4P staff conducted the survey at those 20 parks that scored the highest and lowest in 2005. Evaluations took place on weekdays in June and July 2006, a high-use season for public parks. Teams of trained surveyors used handheld computers and digital cameras to complete the evaluations. For each MSA evaluated, digital photographs were taken; both survey forms and photos are stored as documentation of survey efforts and results.



Corporal Thompson Park, Staten Island, 2006. This basketball court is missing sections, providing an unsafe play area.



Columbus Park, Brooklyn, 2006. Columbus Park provides a green oasis for residents and workers in Downtown Brooklyn.



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