



# Battery Park City Authority

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## **BATTERY PARK CITY AUTHORITY RELEASES FIRST-EVER COMPREHENSIVE PARKS USER COUNT AND STUDY**

*Engagement with Borough of Manhattan Community College Yields Quantitative & Qualitative Review of BPC Parks Usage*

*Parks Successful in Providing Attractive & Safe Environment for Wide Range of Users*

The Battery Park City Authority (BPCA) today released its first-ever, scientific study of the use of Battery Park City's 36 acres of parks and public spaces, an effort aimed at helping BPCA meet the challenges of maintaining the high level of satisfaction that its park users enjoy. The *BPCA Parks User Count & Study*, conducted by Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) researchers and students between July 2017 and June 2018, included statistical counts, surveys by a random sampling of parks users, and focus groups resulting in a bevy of data from a range of users – local residents, visitors from other New York communities, local office employees, and tourists (domestic and international); from those who were experiencing their first visit to others who have been enjoying the parks for 35 years. The Study's findings confirm that Battery Park City parks are extremely successful in providing an attractive and safe environment for a varied array of user populations.

"Parks are good for people, and Battery Park City's parks are no exception. This led us to ask a basic but important question: Who uses our parks and why?" said **BPCA President & Chief Executive Officer B.J. Jones**. "This report will be instrumental in helping us build on our strengths when it comes to maintenance, programming, and horticulture, and help us focus efforts in addressing matters like resiliency, safety, and making our spaces more engaging and welcoming to everyone. This data will help us all in asking better questions and making better decisions, which will lead to better parks as a result."

"As park planners and stewards we are constantly observing and assessing: "Is this the best we can do? Can we provide more, for more people?" This study has the potential to show us how," said **Abby Ehrlich, BPCA Director of Community Partnerships and Engagement**. "This Study answers many of our questions with scientific clarity and neutrality thanks to the expertise of BMCC professors and students."

The full *BPC Parks User Count & Study* is [available on the BPCA website](#) for download and review. Key findings from the Study include:

1. Well over one-half million people – approximately 690,000 – use the parks of Battery Park City each year; this usage rate compares with that of Prospect Park but is markedly less than the High Line, Brooklyn Bridge Park, and Hudson River Park;
2. BPC parks saw a higher percentage of non-resident visitors (45%) than resident visitors over the course of the Study; the researchers also encountered regular visitors who work in BPC (16%) as well as commute through BPC (6%). BPCA is therefore providing services to multiple communities in accordance with its public mission;
3. The average length of residency for those surveyed is eight years; the average length of time having worked in BPC is six-and-one-half years; and the average time that people have been coming to BPC parks is six years;
4. About 47% of visitors come from the New York City Metro area, 31% of visitors come from out-of-state, and 22% are within walking distance of BPC;
5. Most visitors to BPC parks (residents and non-residents alike) come in a group (six out of 10) and about three in 10 people come with a dog; about 11% of people come to BPC parks on bikes;
6. About 25% of visitors to BPC parks were there for the first-time;
7. The Esplanade and views of the Hudson were named as most users' favorite part of BPC parks;
8. Almost four out of 10 of the people visit the public spaces of BPC daily, though residents, perhaps unsurprisingly, are more likely to do so (69%, compared with 32% of non-residents);
9. When asked what brought them to BPC parks on the day of the survey, about three in 10 people report that they came to BPC parks to sightsee, 19% said that they came to walk, and 10% report that they came to walk dogs;
10. When asked about their least favorite things about BPC parks, the highest percentage of respondents (35%) could either think of nothing or said they like everything about BPC parks.

While the beauty and accessibility of BPC's parks and public spaces have long been apparent, aside from attendee counts at BPCA-programmed events their precise benefits were largely anecdotal. It was with an eye toward taking a more scientific approach in analyzing the usage of its parks that BPCA engaged BMCC to conduct a holistic study of how, how often, and by whom they are used. Conducted across three outdoor seasons – summer 2017, fall 2017, and spring 2018 – along with indoor focus groups for BPC residents and neighbors this past winter, the *BPC Parks User Count & Study* entailed thousands of contacts made throughout a dozen of Battery Park City's public spaces, from Rockefeller Park and the North Esplanade down to Pier A Plaza, and from North Cove Marina to West Thames Park, and all points between.

“We are very proud of BMCC professors Michelle Ronda and Robin Isserles who engaged students in this important study to analyze the use of Battery Park City's parks and public spaces, with the aim of continually improving New York City's urban landscape,” says **Karrin E. Wilks, BMCC Interim President**. “This study served as a unique research opportunity for our faculty and students, and established our partnership with Battery Park City to strengthen our local community.”

“The mix of people and diversity of uses in Battery Park City public spaces are impressive, even to the untrained eye,” said **Michelle Ronda, Ph.D., Program Coordinator and Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, BMCC**. “Now, having spent a year immersing myself in the intricacies of these spaces, I am thrilled to have the opportunity to share our findings in support of the continued success of this urban treasure.”

“How successful are the parks of Battery Park City? One wishes that Jane Jacobs and others who argued that its spaces be made accessible to the grand public could see today’s users enjoying themselves as they stroll the Hudson River Esplanade or relax in the brilliantly designed coves, parks and recreation facilities,” said **William Kornblum, Professor Emeritus, Sociology, Graduate Center of the City University of New York**. “For planners and park managers, however, what makes a park system like that of Battery Park City successful hinges on additional questions to be addressed through data gathered about park visitors, and the *BPCA Parks User Count & Study* was designed with just that in mind. The vast majority of park visitors expressed their love and admiration for BPC parks, and this report should assist BPCA in maintaining that extremely high level of enjoyment and approval.”

Some additional findings from the Study include:

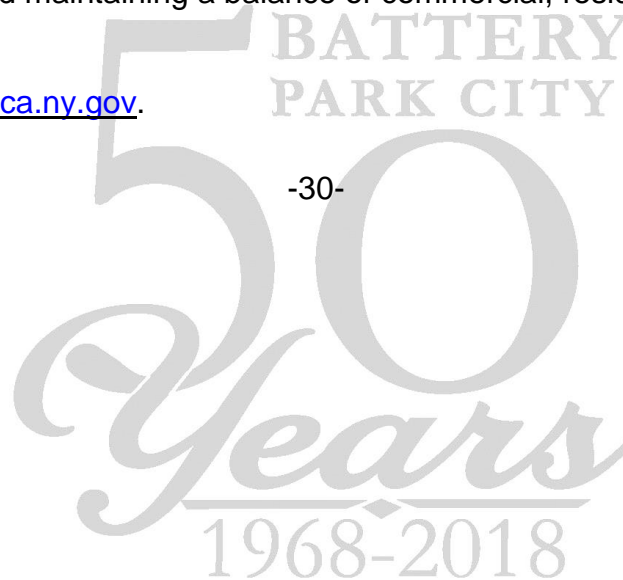
- Battery Park City’s public spaces approach equity in terms of gender of visitors; almost equal numbers of men and women were observed using the public spaces within BPC: 48.9% women, 50.9% men, and 0.2% who identified as other;
- When in BPC parks, users’ most favorite activity is passive leisure – such as enjoying the view from one of the many benches that line the Esplanade, or resting on the well-maintained laws of the parks (42%); indeed, users’ most favorite place in BPC parks (31%) was the Esplanade and its Hudson River views;
- Summer and fall users combined comprise about 73% of those annual visitors, spring users comprise 24%, and winter users about 3% of annual visitors;
- The majority (74%) of users named afternoon as the time they visit BPC parks; equal percentages (41%) visit in the morning and the evening, with smaller percentages reporting early morning visits (22%) or late night visits (7%);
- Users are not as likely to come to BPC parks to visit a specific place (18%) as they are to come for some other reason (42%), or to visit in general (34%); beyond these, the top three specific reasons for visiting BPC parks are for sightseeing (28%), walking (19%), and dog walking (10%);
- BPC residents had more people- and animal-based dislikes, whereas non-residents were slightly more likely to point to amenity-based dislikes, like insufficient restrooms and poor wireless connectivity. Issues of dog waste, hazards caused by bicycles on walkways, and perceptions of crowding at certain times of the day are among the management issues the report highlights;
- Resident visitors most enjoy events as their favorite thing to do in BPC parks (83%); non-resident visitors enjoy using the park spaces for physical activities and family time, but far fewer rate the events as their favorite part of BPC parks (17%);
- More people named a concert or festival as the next event they would plan at BPC parks if they could (26%), followed by a sports event (19%), or an event including children, family, or dogs (15%). About 4% of visitors say there are already plenty of events here, and so they would not come up with a new one.

Concluded **BPCA President & CEO Jones**: “The idea for a new waterfront neighborhood on Manhattan’s lower west side with public parks as its centerpiece was an innovative vision that has become a vibrant community 50 years later. The BPCA Parks User Count & Study helps illustrate how far we’ve come and how to be responsive and effective in the work that awaits us. I hope you will find it as illuminating as we do.”

For a video about the BPCA User Count and Survey, [click here](#).

**About BPCA:** Established in 1968, The Hugh L. Carey Battery Park City Authority is a New York State Public Benefit Corporation charged with developing and maintaining a well-balanced community on the Lower West Side of Manhattan. Battery Park City’s 92-acre site has achieved worldwide acclaim as a model for community renewal in planning, creating, and maintaining a balance of commercial, residential, retail and park space.

For more info visit: [bpca.ny.gov](http://bpca.ny.gov).



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